

Was it worth it?

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by [Im_just_visiting](#)

Summary

When the Ministry of Magic introduces a law requiring all people entering adulthood to marry in order to increase the Wizarding population or be banned from magic and the right to live in the Wizarding World, Sirius Black falls into despair. Totally compromised by his reckless behaviour which led Remus to be removed from the Wizarding World and the walls of Hogwarts, he has zero chance of finding a spouse. Unless he comes across someone as desperate as himself...

Sirius knows only one such person - the damned Snivellus!

Fanfic update every Friday

This story is not mpreg.

But I'm going to add the off shot story with mpreg as a separate part.

Notes

This is the first Snape centred fanfic I've written with a different pairing to Snarry.

Fanfic upadate every Friday

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Part one - 1978.02 - Sirius

"This can't be true! It's complete madness, it's not legal! They can't do this!" Sirius' angry voice carried around the area as he circled and waved his arms, a puff of warm air came out of his mouth.

Like his friends and the other students, he stood wrapped in a cape over a robe, snowflakes melting on his wavy hair reached down to his cheekbones, which accentuating its masculine shape and regular, attractive face with prominent cheekbones, which was now pulled back in a grimace of frustration.

It was a cold February day, but the students took every moment to get out of the overwhelming walls of Hogwarts anyway. The harsh, bright light sharpened the contours, emphasising the contrast between the patches of snow and the black earth emerging from beneath it in places.

The Gryffindor boy felt a painful throbbing in his temples, the stress giving him a migraine.

Others looked at him curiously, at his fruitless rage mixed with despair, some whispered with amusement, some mockingly and with scorn or disgust, but no one approached him.

Only James and Peter were still talking to him, but they were no longer as close as they had been early on, before he had done this complete foolishness. He himself didn't know how he could have thought it a good idea at the time, how he could have thought it funny. If James had arrived a few minutes later, Snape would have been nothing but blood spatter, luckily he got there in time so all that was left was Snape's long stay in hospital, where Madam Pomfrey attended to his wounds from Remus' claws. Lupin did not have time to use his teeth and only it saved Snape's life, and his own. For him, it ended in a disgusting court hearing, a ban on his wand and expulsion from Hogwarts. He was lucky to avoid Azkaban.

From then on, Sirius was treated like a pest, he was universally hated and despised, everyone stayed away from him. It was only his family's high position that allowed him to finish school. There was only one semester left and he could return in disgrace to his family home and lick his wounds.

It seemed that nothing worse would happen, when suddenly the Ministry has enacted a marriage contract law, whereby everyone must have an arranged marriage before graduation in order to "increase the number of pure-blooded magical children". Anyone who fails to do so will have their magic tied up for a period of 10 years. If he or she fails to find a partner again in that time, it will be extended for another 10 years, and so on.

It was absurd, nobody believed it would be approved and yet it was. If it had been announced last year, even though it outraged him, he would have easily found a future wife. In fact, he would have been able to pick and choose, because most girls would have been overjoyed to have him as a husband. But it was then, it is already past time, now all of them moved away when he showed himself, not wanting to be scandalized by the look, not wanting to be considered as having anything to do with him, not wanting to become an object of gossip. His family looked for candidates outside the school, but to no avail as word spread. Even his undisputed superior beauty did not help him, everyone looked with disfavour on the boy who ruined his friend's life.

The new law was announced at the beginning of the first term and by that time almost everyone had already found a partner, only the very few remained. James, of course, had Lily, even Peter started dating a Hufflepuff girl, more out of rationality and necessity than out of gusts of affection, but they got along better than one could expect, so in time it could turn into something deeper, if not love then mutual respect.

Sirius was slowly sinking into more and more despair and desperation, there were only a few

months left to arrange a marriage and he had zero chance of doing so. He didn't want to have his ability to use magic taken away at all, it was part of him, he would feel like a prisoner. On top of that, he wouldn't have been able to live in Wizarding World, or even in Grimmauld Place, because any use of magic would have been forbidden too.

For this reason, in a fit of fruitless anger, he was now pounding his fist against a tree, and the remnants of the snow fell from the branches softly to the ground.

"After all, these 'by force' relationships will not be happy at all!" He let out a sigh of frustration.

Peter just stood looking at his shoes and James nodded, he thought so too.

"No one cares, the most important thing is to produce more pureblood wizards." James sounded as bitter as he was, he knew his marriage to a Muggle girl would not be well received, but fortunately the Ministry did not mandate marrying only within the confines of one's blood status. Not yet, as he appraised the situation with concern. "We serve to breed. Disgusting!"

Sirius looked around until his gaze was caught by the silhouette of a frail, emaciated boy sitting under a tree in the distance, who had evidently used a warming spell because the ground around him was snowless and dry.

Snape, too, had no partner and no chance of marriage; he would soon have to return to his home town and live as a Muggle.

"What if I married him?" With a movement of his head, he pointed in the direction Snape was in. He didn't need to say who he was referring to; James and Peter knew immediately who he was talking about. The fact that such a thing had even crossed his mind said a lot about his level of desperation.

James looked at the long-haired lad for a moment before shaking his head.

"That's a bad idea."

Sirius knew this too, but he needed some hope to grasp onto, some support.

"Why? Because it's Snape?"

Peter looked confusedly around and James with a seriousness unusual for him.

"Because the marriage must be consummated."

Sirius twitched as much. "What, are you sure?" This couldn't be true, this was some kind of nightmare!

"You haven't read it, have you?" James bit his lip.

"No." Sirius admitted.

"Well, read it then." James pulled a pamphlet distributed by the Ministry out of his bag from between his books, flicked through it and opened it to the appropriate page. "Here."

Sirius took the pamphlet from his hand.

"A distinction is made between the rights and duties of spouses:

non-material :

to marital life

to mutual assistance

to fidelity

to work together for the good of the family

material:

to contribute to the needs of the family." James looked over his shoulder and when Sirius finished reading he pointed to a block of further text.

"Now look under the reference to 'marital life'."

Sirius went pale as he read.

"The obligation of marital life consists in the spiritual, physical and economic union of the spouses. Marital life is the natural purpose of marriage and conditions the realisation of its content. Its manifestations are marital life, mutual loyalty of the spouses, consideration of the legitimate

interests and feelings of the other party, sexual intercourse, respect, etc."

James emphasised "sexual intercourse" with his finger and tapped his fingernail on a piece of paper.

Sirius closed his eyes. He felt that his last hope had just gone. Sex with boys was nothing shocking to him, he was bi and had quite a bit of experience in that regard, but this was about Snape.

"This 'sexual intercourse' will be checked somehow?" Sirius clenched his hand into a fist and punched the tree again, his voice sounding strangely alien, betraying his resignation.

James nodded.

"Yes. Look here, point five of the ordinance, "in order to prevent so-called 'fraudulent marriages' it is required that the marriage be consummated, failure to comply with this requirement will mean that the marriage will be invalidated." Well, and in the sixth point it says that this will be controlled by a designated person, you will have to appear at a designated place on a designated day.

See here - the couple must have lived together for at least 10 years for the marriage to be considered sufficient and after any break-up for both parties to retain the magic.

There is also a requirement to try to have offspring, each child reducing the required duration of the marriage by one year. You see, "trying to have offspring" - you have to go to bed with your spouse every now and then."

He closed the pamphlet. "They have secured themselves on every plane." In exasperation, he put the pamphlet back in his bag and patted Sirius on the shoulder, trying to give him encouragement.

Sirius slunk away and sat down under a tree, unconcerned that he sat down on a pile of snow that he had just knocked off a branch. What did it matter, he assessed. He hid his face in his hands for a moment, then moved his hands up and ran his fingers through his own hair.

"Gosh, this is more moronic than I expected! What right do they have to think they can check something like that!"

James clenched his jaws tightly.

"They set the law." It sounded like he was spitting in disgust.

"Why, if they check something like that, don't they check if the couple is in love? That would be more rational after all!" Sirius was overcome with impotent anger, a sense of injustice. He tried hard to find some sense in this regulation but failed to do so.

"Taking into account your plans, it's probably a good thing they don't do that, don't you think?

They probably consider that it doesn't matter, love is not necessary for procreation." James seemed as mentally exhausted and defeated as he was.

James brushed the snow away with his boot, sat down next to Sirius, and after a while Peter joined them. It was all so messed up. They were missing their early lives and Remus, that carefree life they had lost, where their biggest worry was their grades. It was all changing for the worse in a surprisingly fast time.

They sat in silence, their mood getting worse and worse. The Ministry was becoming more and more totalitarian, the future did not look good. From a short distance away, they could hear the laughter and chatter of students who ignored or were unaware of the danger.

Sirius, despite knowing that it had no chance of working, stared at the lone silhouette in the distance, which nevertheless seemed to him to be a last chance, admittedly with a near-zero chance of success, but it was always a glimmer of hope and that was a lot in his current situation.

They could live at Grimmauld Place, it's a huge house, and they would hardly ever have to see each other. It would have been an upgrade in Snape's social standing, he would have gone from working class to aristocracy, he would definitely have nothing to complain about.

The sex issue was a big problem, he felt no attraction to this boy, and he was sure it was reciprocated. Plus Snape certainly hated him even more than he hated him. But well, they were both in a desperate situation, beggars can't be choosers. Despite all the opposition and reluctance to

the idea, Sirius decided to present the idea to the Slytherin boy. This also presented a challenge.

The very thought of seeking contact with his enemy, someone he despised rejected him. He would have to go and initiate a conversation, face scorn and ridicule, who knows, maybe rejection. But it was still worth it. He was willing to negotiate with him, try to reach his good sense, beg, plead, persuade and threaten, anything, just to get this scoundrel to agree to this damned marriage. He hoped that he, too, was now sitting and despairing, completely aware that life was about to change 180 degrees, that all the years of study at Hogwarts were going to be in vain. Sirius knew that the boy was taking this very seriously, even more so than himself, because for Snape, this meant getting out of poverty and poor living conditions, this was his only chance. He himself, at worst, would get money from his family and live somewhere among the Muggles, maybe start drinking, but he would always have financial support. Snape will have to readjust, find a job, even the comfort of being an alcoholic was not available to him. And it's all very well for him to face the worst, most difficult and boring life possible, maybe it will increase the chances of Snape making the right decision.

Sirius was even willing to give Snape part of his fortune as a bribe, just to get him to agree. Snape must have been aware of his situation, Sirius was sure, it couldn't be that he was the only one bothered by it.

One thought suddenly popped into his head.

What happened in the event of the death of one of the spouses? Could the person who lived have retained their magic?

No, he wouldn't, not even for his freedom. Snape could have felt safe. If only he'd agreed to the marriage, of course. It's only ten years, after that they could go their separate ways and forget about the affair, Snape could even get alimony from him, he didn't care, he could pay him a large sum for the rest of his life, it was a small price to pay for keeping his magic. Yes, the perspective of asking Snape was very unpleasant, but frustration, desperation and despair were enough for motivation.

Finally Sirius made up his mind. He rose from the ground, straightened up. "I'll talk to him." And he moved towards Snape.

It felt like every step he took weighed a ton, and that the whole world held its breath. The closer he got, the more stress and uncertainty gripped him, but determination drove him forward.

Snape, engrossed in the book he held in his lap, still didn't notice him, but it was only a matter of time.

For the first time in his life Sirius looked intently at a boy he had known for years, whom he had often accosted but whose personality he had never really known, until now he had seen him but had not thought about the view. Out of habit he and James teased him about his big nose or his greasy hair, without even thinking about whether it was actually such, they needed something to pick on and this was as good as any.

Now, from an ever-decreasing distance, he was looking at shiny, long black hair, a very pale complexion of an unhealthy shade, protruding cheekbones, a sharp profile with a pronounced hooked nose, long, skinny fingers flicking through the pages of a book. It could have been worse, he could have been obese, with a double chin and a bald head, Sirius consoled himself. Suddenly Snape's face turned violently towards him and his slightly slanted, almond-shaped, coal-black eyes narrowed as he reached for his wand.

Sirius quickly raised and spread his arms to show that he did not intend to attack him, but Snape clearly did not believe him, sensing some kind of ruse because he still had not lowered his wand, and quickly checked his surroundings, looking for the rest of the Marauders with his eyes.

Paranoid, assessed Sirius. By the time he approached, Snape had risen to his feet, his black arched eyebrows were drawn together in a grimace of rage.

"Easy, easy," Sirius still had his hands raised. He was annoyed by Snape's attitude but preferred not to show it.

"What do you want, Black?" Snape was clearly trying to strike a threatening pose, but as he only reached Sirius' jaw and was half his size, he didn't quite succeed. If he had wanted to, Sirius could have beaten him with a flick of his wrist, Snape's skeletal physique was no match for his athletic build. But this time Snape was lucky.

"I want to talk" Sirius took a step closer.

"Go talk to your friends" Snape hissed angrily, but it hasn't moved back one millimetre. Compared to the warmly dressed Sirius, he in his light clothing gave the impression of being too undressed.

"What I want to talk about concerns you, it might help you." Sirius knew it wouldn't be easy, so he didn't give up. Snape was notorious for his obnoxious personality, no one was surprised by this. He supposed he'd get along quicker with a cobra than with this boy. Snape merely snorted contemptuously, just as Sirius had expected.

"I'm not interested. Go and talk to James!" His body was taut, ready to attack, his long black hair hanging loosely around his emaciated face.

Sirius walked even closer, entering Snape's private space.

"One more step and I will hex you!" Snape growled warningly, raising his wand so that everyone could see it. Some pupils took an interest in their interaction and watched curious developments.

"Are you scared?" Sirius spoke up before he thought it through, and just a moment later he was thrown back a few metres, where he landed on his back. Well, he should have bitten his tongue. He quickly rose to his feet and walked back towards the Slytherin.

"Look, I'm not attacking you!" He spread his arms again. "Don't act like a child!"

Snape again just snorted contemptuously and squinted. "Don't act like an idiot, Black! We have nothing to talk about." He took a step back and it seemed as if he was going to turn and walk away,

so Sirius, without thinking long, grabbed his wrist, so narrow that he easily wrapped his fingers around it and still had plenty of room left and held him down. Snape's skin was warm and soft, very pleasant to the touch on this cold winter day.

"Stay, we need to talk." His tone sounded commanding and threatening. Almond black eyes widened in surprise for a second, then Snape jerked his hand hard, trying unsuccessfully to free himself.

"Are you completely mad?" Sirius was sure that in addition to rage and bewilderment, there was panic lurking in Snape's voice. He looked with mild surprise at the no longer jerking boy. Snape evidently decided that he would get nowhere by trying to break free, so he stood still and just stared defiantly, lifting his narrow chin.

"We need to talk." Repeated the Gryffindor boy firmly. The long-haired boy still looked at him for a while with suppressed rage and hatred, then finally decided to relent.

"Say what you have to say quickly." And he jerked his arm violently, trying to free himself, but Sirius's grip was just as strong as before, and then it strengthened warningly, in all likelihood leaving bruises on his white skin.

"Get your hands off me!" He almost howled in exasperation and Sirius finally let him go. Snape looked like he was going to rub his wrist but thought twice.

Sirius, out of curiosity, cast a quick glance at his wrist, on which he could actually already see a reddened mark appearing in the shape of his fingers.

"Speak before I change my mind!" Snape took a few steps back to show that this was no idle threat. Sirius sighed with resignation.

"Ok. It's about that marriage thing, it seems that from next year you'll be living as an ordinary Muggle, devoid of magic."

Snape twitched as if struck, recoiled violently, and red spots appeared on his cheeks from rage.

"You son of a bitch! Is that what you so necessarily wanted to tell me?" With a quick step, he swept past Sirius and set off in the direction of the castle. Sirius grabbed him again, this time by the shoulder, so that Snape's body did a full spin as he pulled him back, Slytherin wobbled for a moment before managing to regain his balance.

"What's wrong with you, Black! Leave me alone!" This time he didn't even try to hide his stress as he shouted and jostled. Many people began to turn towards them, curious about the commotion, some starting to giggle and comment.

"Stop making a scene! I just want to talk. If you don't calm down immediately, I'm going to drag you somewhere where it's just the two of us and you'll have to listen, understand?" He knew he shouldn't have threatened him, it was unlikely to increase the chances of an amicable end to the situation, but he wasn't the most patient of people and Snape was already starting to piss him off. He hoped Snape's dislike of Muggles would outweigh his rage and hatred of Marauders. To emphasise his words, he clasped his hand more tightly around Snape's forearm, which was almost as narrow as the wrist of this skinny boy.

"It wasn't mocking or teasing, just stating the situation as it is. Do you have a plan for marriage? Have you found someone?" Snape pressed his lips tighter together and didn't speak, which Sirius took as an answer. "That's what I thought. I didn't either. We are in the same boat."

"And in what way should I care!" Snape hissed, not stopping his tugging. Slowly a circle of the other students formed around them, luckily they still didn't get too close.

"We can help each other." It was finally said.

Snape suddenly stood still, Sirius could see the meaning of the words coming through to him. Snape's mouth moved callously before he could gather his words.

"You don't mean that, do you? You must be crazy! "

Spots of blush appeared on his cheeks, whether from rage or embarrassment, it is difficult to say.

This time he didn't shout, his hiss was just a little louder than a whisper, he looked around at the surroundings. "You're an idiot if you expect me to fall for that!" His uplifted face blazed with anger.

"It's not a joke, really. I'm in the same situation you are, and I have no desire to live without magic." Sirius tried to speak as calmly as possible, he also let go of Snape's arm. "That's what I wanted to talk about."

Snape stepped back, crossed his arms over his chest and shook his head. "Forget it, Black, I hate you and want nothing to do with you."

Sirius rolled his eyes.

"And I love you and that's why I'm proposing to you."

Snape's face grew even more flushed.

Smack! The sound of a slap on the cheek cut through the air. Sirius touched himself to his face in disbelief.

"Oh, what's that for? Did I hurt your feelings?" With difficulty he restrained the impulse to give him a punch, to strike that cocky, stubborn face, with the blows of his fists to force him to obey. Snape evidently expected to be hit because he took half a step back before stopping and facing him. "Think logically, Snape! Do you want to go back to the little town you came from and work like your father, in the mill?" Out of the corner of his eye he saw James and Peter come closer, joined by Lily, to whom Potter was explaining something in her ear. It wasn't hard to guess what.

"Think about it! There's very little time left, this is the only chance for any of us to stay in the Wizarding World. " Their behaviour was attracting more and more interest, people were openly laughing at this slap in the face, soon they would get too close to be able to continue this pathetic attempt at conversation. "Think what your friend Lucius will say when you become a magic-less Muggle? "

Snape had finally had enough of this speech because he moved a little closer to Sirius before he hissed. "It's not your concern, Black! Get away from me!"

He then spun away from him, and turning to walk away, threw over his shoulder "Forget your absurd ideas."

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. "As you prefer. But if you change your mind then know that my offer stands." Bitch, he judged in his mind. If it hadn't been a supreme necessity he would never have tried to talk to him, let alone talk about marrying him!

This time he let him go, mentally exhausted as he watched Snape's long black hair wave with his every furious step. Huh, at least he tried. Resignedly, he moved towards the group of friends, as always feeling a painful pressure on his heart when he realised Remus was no longer at Hogwarts.

"It didn't go well?" James tried to be supportive, but there wasn't really much he could do. "Maybe there will be someone else."

Sirius knew full well that neither of them believed that. "What a crooked idiot! I offered him such an opportunity, he could have avoided all his problems for such a small price!" He shook his head and spread out his hands. Snape should have understood that the offer did not come out of a gust of heart, but out of necessity. Yes, he certainly knew that, but his hatred overrode his instinct for self-preservation. He was dumber than he appeared, Sirius judged bitterly.

"Maybe he'll think again? It was quite a sudden, shocking and unexpected proposition, you have to admit it!" Lily tried to console him.

Her and James' wedding was planned for next month, Sirius was invited, of course, James, exposing himself to ostracism, even asked him to be his best man. Sirius was bloody grateful to him. He knew that his friend had also taken the situation with Remus hard, they had even argued about it and beaten each other up, but over time James had almost completely forgiven him, he understood that it was an accident and not something Sirius wanted to achieve, and that he regretted it far more than one could imagine. And so Sirius was punished by the whole world and

his guilt will be on him until death, there was no point in adding to his burden. Instead, favour for Sirius had become a very scarce commodity, so to the extent that James could offer it to him, he did so.

"I hope so. I've fallen really low to beg Snape for something." Defeat crushed him, he felt as if the last remnants of his hope had been taken away, he felt like crying but refrained, he wasn't going to make a spectacle of himself. What Snape had done was enough.

He looked in the direction in which the silhouette of the aforementioned boy had disappeared. Sirius hated him now ten times more than usual, imagining his bloody face with the broken nose made him feel a little better.

"Let's go and have a drink at the Three Broomsticks Inn." Eventually Peter spoke up and it was the best suggestion made that day.

A week passed, and another, and Sirius lost hope that Snape would change his mind. He was slowly coming to terms with the thought of losing magic and the whole world that had been his home. It would only be fair, for what he had done to Remus. He should consider it his punishment, he deserved it.

Although he tried to come to terms with it, to accept his fate, with each passing day, Sirius became more and more depressed and sedated, started drinking more and more, spent most of his free time lying on his bed, too exhausted to do anything. He felt despair like a pain crushing his chest, driving a blade into his heart.

What was the point, why try if the result would be the same?

All day long, if he wasn't sticking with friends busy with wedding preparations, he walked around the huge castle, under the indifferent stares of the students and the sympathetic eyes of the house elves.

Somehow, time simultaneously dragged on as if it had been stuck with glue and rushed by like mad. The weather was getting nicer every day, spring was getting closer and closer but Sirius didn't notice it, too absorbed by his own misery. Each day he looked in the mirror in surprise, unable to believe that he was not covered in wrinkles and grey from stress. Sometimes he would cry when no one could see him, sometimes he would scream and kick things and sometimes he would sit apathetically. The will to live, the vitality, the youth fought for better with desperation and slowly began to lose. He had the impression that he was beyond the world of the living. And he drank, a lot of alcohol, it was the only thing that brought relief.

His fellow pupils learned to leave him alone, avoided him like a plague when he strolled about, or when in the evening he lay drunk on the bed behind his curtain. Apart from James and Peter who still stuck by him that is.

Apparently no one reported to anyone and even if they did, no one bothered him. None of the teachers cared; apparently they all considered him a lost cause. And this is what he was.

Sometimes he wondered if he should finish himself, but some hope, a tiny shadow of it, still held him back.

Is this how Remus felt? Devoid of hope, with his life shattered, completely wiped out, forgotten and abandoned? He certainly did, only the finality of it all deprived him of even the possibility of a shred of hope. Sirius still was privileged in this matter. He was most ashamed of himself, that despite the fact that he deserved his fate, deserved his punishment, he still tried to cling to every flicker of hope, every even the smallest possibility. He spent hours wasting the time of the people who still cared about him, telling them about it, and they listened, and comforted him, as if he deserved it. How pathetic can one be?

In the same way, another month passed. During two week's Easter break James and Lily got married. The ceremony took place in the Potter family's beautiful estate. The place was not as impressive as the Black family estate, but Sirius loved it. The Potter family still treated him like a son, he still had a place with them, it touched and pleased him. His own family only helped him out of a sense of duty and to avoid a bigger scandal. As if it could be avoided! The black sheep will forever remain a black sheep, living as a Muggol and bringing shame to the pure blood family.

Soon...

There were hundreds of guests at the wedding, a live band was playing, there was an atmosphere of happiness everywhere, and no wonder, James and Lily really loved each other, and were planning to marry anyway.

Sirius managed to keep a neutral expression on his face and somehow hang on until the end of the wedding. Dressed in festive clothes, with a cheerful face, that was all he had the strength for. During the wedding he indulged in alcohol. He hid with a bottle in a little-used corner of the house, not wanting to be seen, not wanting James to guess how much the sight of this wedding reminds Sirius of his own fate and the fact that he will not succeed. It is a reflection of his vicious failure, showing him all that he lost when he began his downward spiral that fateful day. Soon, later this year, it will all be taken away from him and he will live somewhere forgotten by friends enjoying their own lives, working if he wants to or drinking the Blacks' money. Maybe he will turn into a complete drunkard and drink himself to death, all in all there was nothing left for him.

He was so absorbed in self-pity that he didn't even notice that James had found him.

"Hey, is it that bad?" He crouched down beside him.

Sirius immediately made an effort to pick himself up. He closed his eyes for a second because he feared he wouldn't be able to hold back his tears. "No, I just wanted to rest for a while." He smiled to emphasise his words. "I'm damn glad for your happiness!" He reached out and patted him on the shoulder.

James didn't look convinced, but nodded. "Lily said Snape went to visit his family for the Easter break. Maybe a close encounter with the rest of his life will give him food for thought."

"Huh. It's so ironic, in that idiot's hands lies my future!" Sirius shook his head bitterly and pouted his lips slightly, as if to a barely restrained cry.

He rubbed his eyes to wipe away the tear that had managed to escape. "Fuck it, now I'm here and everything is great, tomorrow doesn't matter!" He pulled himself up on his feet. "Let's go, I'd like to dance with the bride!"

What was the point of despairing and poisoning a friend's wedding with your sadness? Soon he let all thoughts escape as he whirled and tossed to the beat of the music. For a moment he was free again, he was the old Sirius again.

After the wedding, James and Lily left for a short honeymoon in Malta, and Sirius stayed at the Potter house, hiding from gossip and angry stares, trying to recover at least a little mentally. Next month Peter and his fiancée were going to have a modest wedding, without any wedding party or large family gatherings, planning only to have dinner with both parties' parents and go out for a beer in the evening, with friends, because there was no reason for a big celebration and from then on Sirius would be the last of them over whom a sentence would hang.

After returning from the Easter break, nothing had changed at first. Snape had avoided him as much as before, and Sirius was counting down the days until the end of school with increasing panic. By now, almost all the students of the final year were married, there were only a few left who had not yet done so, but apart from Snape and Sirius, all of them intended to do so soon. Some of the students looked happy, usually those who had married someone out of love, others looked moderately positive, people who otherwise would not have had much of a chance to marry, and there were others who looked depressed, as if their wings had been clipped because of a marriage of convenience to someone they were indifferent to. Snape seemed as indifferent as ever, a happy-go-lucky bastard, Sirius judged. He himself, though he tried to mask it, looked like a person doomed to die, someone on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Every time he went to Hogsmeade the pain squeezed his heart, what he wouldn't give to be able to live even there! He tried to remember all the details, all the pictures of places he loved and were

important to him, the names of restaurants and shops, streets and squares from the Wizarding World, to have a map of it at least in his heart. And the faces of friends, that's the most important thing. He doubted if he will meet them often when he starts to live the life of Muggol. In the beginning, probably yes, they will visit him as often as possible, with time less and less, their life paths will diverge, they will have less and less to say to each other, until one day they will remain only a memory.

This year the N.E.W.T.s aroused far less interest than in previous years, far fewer people took the exams, the sudden changes in the lives of the students effectively distracting them. Snape, of course, was also one of the few students taking exams that year.

Sirius was also not very interested in them, in fact, he could give them up. Anyway, immediately after writing them he will be deprived of magic. He could easily have spent that time on anything else, but James and Lily were involved, studying for hours every day, so he still didn't give up, he didn't want to be left alone. Huh, he became so desperate, so dependent on them.

Two more months of school, and it was over. Time passed quickly, everything seemed surreal, changing like a kaleidoscope.

Sirius was looking for a home among the Muggles, but he didn't put his heart into it, in fact he could live anywhere, what does the appearance of a tomb matter to the one buried inside?

Self-pitying, that's what he does best, assessed with displeasure. He only hoped that it wasn't apparent from him that on the outside he seemed if not carefree then indifferent. He did not want to give anyone the satisfaction of seeing him fall.

Similar thoughts were rattling around in his head as he lay stretched out on a bench under a tree one May afternoon. Somehow, the world seemed ordinary, like every day, completely indifferent to the tragedies taking place. Rays of the sun shone through green, well-watered leaves, birds flew in the sky.

Plunged in his thoughts, he failed to notice when suddenly Snape approached him. He moved silently and agilely like a cat, Sirius only noticing him when he was close to him. He could not have been more surprised. Every now and then, different students passed them as the Slytherin stood in silence, his long black hair framed a thin, pale face, falling to his shoulders. As always, he was wearing a robe, looking like the personification of death. In the eyes of Sirius he appeared like a peace-bringing angel.

He supposed Snape was still unsure of Sirius's intentions, whether that proposal was a form of mockery of him.

"Snape." Sirius broke the silence, and started cautiously, not wanting to get his hopes up and show his feelings too much so as not to scare away the standing boy. "I presume you are unlikely to have changed your mind about my proposal."

Black, almond-shaped eyes looked at him blankly. "Is this a real proposal or a joke?" He was clearly trying to make his voice sound indifferent. It was a strange, unnatural situation, the first time they had spoken civilly, on top of that it was Snape approached him. He never expected it to ever come to this!

Sirius picked himself up and sat down, his heart beginning to beat faster because of the growing fragile hope.

"Real. I'm in the same position as you and I don't want to lose my magic." He shook his head, trying to look as unthreatening as possible, all the time not wanting to frighten him away. Slytherin boy was paranoid, that's something he had already learnt in time.

Snape nodded silently, with his expressionless face as serious as ever.

"Oh? Will you reconsider?" He tried to make his voice sound as indifferent as possible, not pushy, even though Sirius was so desperate that he was ready to beg him to do so.

"Fine, I agree." Snape crossed his arms over his shoulders, and stood sternly upright.

Sirius wasn't sure he understood correctly.

"Do you agree to reconsider?" He began cautiously.

Snape rolled his eyes. "No, I agree to do it." He avoided the word 'marry', it was clearly too difficult, too much at once.

Suddenly it was as if the whole world disappeared, it was just the two of them. For a moment, he wasn't sure if he had misheard, or if it was his hope that had played such a joke on him, and wanted to pinch himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming, but no, Severus was really standing in front of him, Sirius was sure of it. He felt so relieved that he felt dizzy for a moment. And then he was so relieved that he almost burst out crying. Instead, he picked himself up from the bench and moved closer to the shorter boy.

"Really!"

Snape took a step back. "Don't come near me and stop getting excited." He seemed very defensive, his hand clenched the wand that suddenly slipped out of his sleeve. "Yes."

Sirius immediately retreated as well. Careful, Sirius, you have to be very careful not to frighten that snake away, he thought.

"When?"

Snape shrugged his shoulders. "Whichever, as long as it's before the end of the school year." His face showed no emotion the whole time, as if they were not now planning one of the biggest things they were going to do in their lives, something that would save their situation. He's pretending, as I was pretending, Sirius guessed.

"Very well! We need to discuss the details carefully. Would you rather do it somewhere else or does it suit you here?" With a movement of his head, he indicated the bench.

"Here is fine."

So Sirius sat down again, happy and excited, and watched as Snape walked over and sat down carefully not too close to him. His petite figure seemed tense all the time. So he was stressed too, Sirius judged. Good! He didn't know if it was being in his hometown that had changed Snape's attitude or something else but it didn't matter, the most important thing was that it had. He felt light, deliriously happy.

"We can live in my house, it's huge, we'll each be able to have a couple of rooms to ourselves for private flats, we won't have to see each other practically at all." He chattered excitedly. "You'll be able to do what you want, what you planned to do, or nothing at all, if you so choose, you'll have access to the Blacks' money and you'll get paid every month. A lot of money."

Snape pressed his lips together and shook his head. "Black, I already told you, stop getting excited! You think I'm a whore, Black?! Don't try to bribe me, I don't want your money! I intend to produce and sell potions."

Well yes, Sirius should have known better, indeed Snape is too proud for that.

"Fine, but we have to live together."

Snape squinted his eyes.

"I know what we must, Black. I read the pamphlet carefully."

Oh, that made it easier to move on to more sensitive topics, Sirius assessed.

"Good, then you know what is required of us." He grunted, despite the fact that the subject of sex was close to his heart, discussing it so matter-of-factly, so emotionlessly, like a shopping list, with this strange boy he didn't even like made him slightly uneasy. "Well then, I suppose this matter can be dealt with once a month."

Snape raised an eyebrow and looked at him defiantly. "I didn't know it would embarrass you so much, Black!" He grinned mockingly and Sirius felt like slapping him. "THIS MATTER... Yes, I

think so too, certainly not more often. " That voice. So contemptuous, superior, irritating. It immediately got on Sirius' nerves. Damn you, Snape!

Sirius met his gaze and, all the while looking into his eyes, commented. "I'm glad YOU are approaching the issue of sex between us with such ease, it will make things a lot easier for us." This caused Snape's eyes to widen slightly and his face to blush. What, are you not so brave about anymore, Snape? Laughed Sirius in spirit. Good!

Seizing the moment during which Snape was speechless, Sirius resumed his cheerful planning. "Ok, I'll take care of the wedding, I think the sooner the better. I'll also have the rooms ready for you, move in when you want."

Sirius couldn't wait to tell James and Lily about it. He knew that before he could get up from that bench, the rumour of their unexpected conversation together would spread throughout Hogwarts. He gazed intently for a moment at the face of the boy sitting next to him. He will have to learn to talk to it if he wants to live in reasonably tolerable conditions. With a sigh he estimated his fiancé. A fair complexion, without blemishes or pimples, very pale, black eyebrows raised high like a bird's wing, a wide, a mouth, more on the thinner side than the fuller side, sunken cheeks, very prominent cheekbones, pronounced, hooked nose, long, shiny black hair framing a small face, and those eyes of his that seemed to see right through the interlocutor. It was precisely this look that provoked aggression in Sirius. The look and the arrogant, provocative words that followed it. But if Sirius were to be honest with himself he would admit that Snape was far from being ugly, rather the words 'dark' or 'disturbing' reflected reality more.

He imagined him leaning over, holding him by the jaw and kissing him.

Still, it wasn't a tempting idea, even gross and on top of that, Snape would probably scratch his eyes out. No, it was still too early for such thoughts; just because he felt a great deal of gratitude and relief in that moment didn't mean he had stopped hating him. He quickly shook off these visions.

"I'd most like to get married today, before that fool has a second thought!" Sirius was almost dancing, unable to stand still with excitement, much to the delight of his watching friends. For the first time in many months, he felt light, at ease, a weight had been lifted from his back, and his face was bright with a smile. Sirius was so happy as if it was someone he loved, someone who mattered, who had agreed to marry him today and not Snape. Feelings, love, it didn't matter, it didn't count, it could be dealt with later. The most important thing was to get out of his tragic situation. He will worry about all the problems after the wedding and not before. Why bother with such a thing at this point?

He finished talking to Severus and they split up, each in their own direction a few minutes ago, and Sirius, ignoring the curious glances of the other students, almost ran to tell his friends about this unexpected gift from fate. Snape being a gift from fate! Unbelievable how much one's perspective changes depending on where one is. But, a beggar cannot be a chooser, and so it is good that Snivellus agreed, it is his last chance.

James and Lily, although surprised, seemed as happy as he was, patting him on the shoulder and laughing in relief.

"I don't want to sound moralistic, but you're going to have to stop talking about him like that." Lily admonished Sirius. "First of all, you may inadvertently say so in front of him, and I doubt it will increase his favour, and secondly at the moment he's your fiancé and soon to be husband. How you treat him will say a lot about you to others and that is how you will be judged."

Sirius slipped his fingers into his mouth and pretended to vomit. "Lily, please dose it to me in moderation, okay?"

Lily tapped him lightly on the shoulder. "Remember, he's saving you from being stripped of your magic."

Sirius, feeling better than he has in recent weeks or even months, and has just regained his former vitality and good humour, rolled his eyes and with a flourish sat down on James' bed beside him.

"Yes, yes, I know. Of course, he benefits himself as well." Nevertheless, he turned serious. "You're right, I'll control myself, I wouldn't want to discourage him from marrying or provoke a divorce too soon." They sat in the Gryffindor common room, so they talked freely.

"I'll try to arrange the wedding later this week." He beamed contentedly. "After that, just an unpleasantness in the form of Snape's shagging and we're set." He added in a light tone, still not really thinking about it. All the while, he tried to approach it optimistically, but deep down he was not thrilled about it. An inexperienced virgin. Just what he needed.

On the other hand, it shouldn't be so bad. Yes, he hadn't been with a virgin yet, but with boys he had and Severus, however annoying he might be, is a man, built and reacting like others. Sirius should be able to handle it easily. Well, they're going to fuck, big deal. Sirius has done this sort of thing before, obviously not with someone like Snape, obviously, but what difference does it really make? A body is a body.

James and Peter started to laugh and Lily shook her head and sighed. "You are incorrigible."

"I'm doing the best I can, ok? I'm just not particularly happy about this necessity!" Sirius burst out laughing. More of a tease than the truth, for the sake of keeping his magic he was willing to fuck not only Snape but Slughorn as well, and on the Great Hall table.

"Then think of him, you at least are bi and have experience."

Oh, that hadn't occurred to Sirius, he hadn't even thought about that question for a second. His face went blank.

"Fuck... So on top of all this I'm still going to have to teach Snape to have sex with a guy." This

prompted another round of laughter from the boys.

This time it was Lily's turn to roll her eyes.

"Don't worry, you might not have to, you have a good chance of making him think twice with your behaviour." Lily stared at him. "Treat him with respect, or you'll both lose out."

This made Sirius sober up a bit and James and Peter stopped laughing.

"Alright, you are right. It's not so easy to suddenly change my way of thinking 180 degrees, but I'll do it. After all, this son of a bitch saves my skin."

The conversation was far too serious for Sirius' taste. Worse still, Lily had no intention of changing it apparently. "How do you imagine your life together?"

"I'd rather not!" Sirius burst out laughing, but Lily didn't seem impressed. "I don't know, he'll do what he wants and I'll do what I want and that's basically it." Was he really expected to think about such a thing NOW? Like, for real?

Later that day, Sirius contacted his family to inform them of the happy news. They weren't particularly thrilled when they heard who he would marry but they weren't fussy, it was better than nothing. Half-blood lad from Cokeworth???? From a poor, working-class family? Unbelievable how low their heir and first-born had fallen! Sirius had to listen to his fair share of complaining, the whining, angry wails from his mother and the condemning, harsh growls from his father, about what a disappointment he was, and that Regulus this and Regulus that, but he didn't care.

The most important thing is that he has succeeded, succeeded, succeeded! He will keep his magic! Eventually both Walpurga and Orion realised that their words did not make any impression on their rebellious, unreasonable son and stopped complaining, instead taking up something constructive. Sirius had originally planned to do the wedding party at the Potter estate where he lived after another big row with his parents over some unimportant thing his parents thought was important, but his family protested the idea - what a scandal it would be, how much talk from other pure blood families if the eldest son of the Black family were to get married at another family's estate! Never! As a wedding present, they promised him a house at 12 Grimmauld Place, which was no great sacrifice on their part as they had recently bought a new, larger property and were in the process of moving. For the time being, the hatchet of war was buried and Sirius' parents promised to take care of everything.

As they promised, they did, and already for next week Sirius' family managed to get a free date at the registry office, and the modest wedding ceremony was to take place at the Black family country estate. They weren't going to hide the fact of the wedding, on the contrary, they wanted everyone to know, but they weren't going to throw a huge party about it either, it just wasn't worth it.

The only thing left to do was to inform Snape, with whom he had not spoken once since the decision to marry was made. No doubt neither of them had made any effort to make the situation less awkward.

For his best man Sirius chose James, reciprocating the honour. He had no idea who Snape would choose, but that would soon become apparent.

Somehow, the rumour of their wedding hadn't yet spread around Hogwarts, probably because apart from that conversation they hadn't conducted themselves together. And it's a good thing, there was no need to stress this loser, he might have changed his mind at the last minute.

Being in a good mood, Sirius unfolded the map and looked for Snape on it, he wasn't going to chase him all over the school grounds. It turned out that he was in the library. Perfect! They should have privacy there, there aren't usually very many people in there. He grabbed the first book he

could find to give himself an alibi, although he didn't think it would be necessary, no one cared, and set off towards the library.

Soon he opened the door and following the requirements of culture, entered quietly a huge, high proom filled with thousands of books. Sitting at a table cluttered with piles of books, Snape raised his gaze and his hand automatically tightened on his wand.

"Hey, relax, it's just me!" Sirius grinned and came closer with a light step. Snivellus, paranoid as always! Sirius was curious when he would finally stop behaving like that, it had been a few months since he and James had stopped teasing him, he could stop showing off already.

Snape pressed his lips together but did not speak, instead returning to his interrupted reading, but Sirius was too pleased to be so easily discouraged. Without thinking for a long time, he sat down on the armchair railing where his future husband was sitting, who violently moved away from him and looked at him with a mixture of astonishment and rage.

"What are you doing, Black!" His mouth curved in a grimace of anger, warningly showing his teeth as he almost hissed.

Sirius smiled broadly at him.

"I have come to inform you of your wedding date!" There was undisguised joy in his voice. Snape, for a change, twitched slightly when he heard these words, clearly not sharing the Gryffindor boy's good mood. This Sirius could not understand. If keeping magic was not a cause for happiness, he did not know what else it could have been. He himself was intoxicated by this joy, feeling like he was on a high from the moment the wedding was decided.

"We managed to find a free date for next Friday! The wedding party will be organised by my family, it will be held at our country estate anyway! If your family wants to add something from their own side, to contribute to the organisation, they should come forward as soon as possible!" He patted his knee with enthusiasm, black eyes closely following his every gesture. "Who do you choose as best man or woman? "

For a brief moment Snape seemed shaken, his eyes widening for a fleeting second and then returning to his indifferent look.

"Lucius." A brief reply fell. "As for the family, they won't want to." Snape fell silent for a moment, and his cold gaze shifted from the page he was reading to Sirius. "I don't know why waste time, money and effort to organise anything." His hands clenched so tightly around the book he was holding that his knuckles turned white.

Sirius looked surprised at this answer, if he knew correctly Severus was an only child, but out of politeness he did not broach the subject, why should they have a row now? Instead he alluded to what he could and nodded approvingly, it was a sensible choice. "Great! He's my cousin's husband, so it'll even be more fitting."

Snape turned his face away, and looked somewhere in front of him. "I don't need your permission, Black!"

Sirius stared at the sharp profile of the boy with whom he would spend the next ten years of his life and tried to contain his growing irritation. Concentrate on the positive things Sirius, he admonished himself in thought, such as the fact that, when they could divorce, they would still be young. The future life looked beautiful!

"Of course not." He agreed with him. "I was just happy." He leaned his elbow against his knee, supported his chin with his hand and tilted his head. "Ah, that's right! Are you going to change your surname to mine or add it to yours?"

Snape jumped up as far as he could in his chair and turned to face him rapturously.

"Are you kidding me?! I'm not a woman!" His very pale complexion blushed on his cheekbones with rage, and his almond black eyes flashed lightning.

To Sirius the question seemed to make sense, the Blacks were an old family with a worthy surname, but apparently not to Snape. Ok, no problem, Sirius backed away quickly, not wanting to

risk his fiancée taking offence.

He didn't know what he could say and what he couldn't say in the company of this boy who, it seemed, was angry about everything.

"You're right, I was just wondering." Sirius cast a glance at the books lying on the table. "Are you studying for N.E.W.T?" He tried to defuse the atmosphere, and the subject of learning was certainly close to this rabid snake's heart, he assessed.

"No, I'm trying on a wedding dress." Snape snarled, he did not let himself be pacified easily, obviously. With a gasp of indignation, he demonstratively returned to his reading, stiffly straightening back and narrow shoulders, lifting the book far too close to his face. Is he short-sighted? It's interesting, perhaps it's because of this that he doesn't like sport!

"Hey, I was just trying to be nice."

Without taking his eyes off his reading, Snape growled. "Spare me!" He rolled his eyes. "Oh god, leave me alone...Sirius! I'm trying to learn!" His voice sounded cold and contemptuous. All in all, this did not surprise Sirius; Snape was excellent at being cold and contemptuous, he mastered it every day. Angry, moody, annoying, unpredictable.

Sirius envied James a little, that he would marry someone he loved and was going to marry anyway, not waste a year. But compared to the possibility of wasting his whole life, those 10 years seemed a small price to pay.

He sighed in the spirit, looked at the small, fierce face with its eyebrows drawn together and stood up from his seat.

"Ok, I'm not bothering you anymore." Reaching the door he turned towards Snape. "Be ready after class on Friday, we're going as soon as it's over."

Snape lifted his face from above the book and for a moment their eyes met, black almond eyes looked defiantly into grey ones.

"I don't agree to any wedding party." His voice sounded as indifferent as he could manage.

Already problems are arising, Sirius sighed in spirit again. He was under the impression that with him around he would do nothing but sigh and sigh. "Oh, just as I said, my family has already taken care of organising it. Don't worry, you won't have to be a part of it for long!"

And Sirius left escorted away with an annoyed look, despite this not-so-pleasant confrontation still in a good mood. At the most, his husband would be a little bitch with his insufferable personality, big deal, as if he hadn't always been like that and as if that was the most important thing!

The end of the school year no longer presented itself as the end of the world. Of course, he would miss Hogwarts, here he had spent a considerable time of his life, a very pleasant one in fact, and had become accustomed to the rhythm of the days, the bustle and meeting friends. But now he had a future ahead of him and that made a huge difference.

Although it was not his dream wedding, Sirius allowed the enthusiasm to sink in and began making plans for the food to be served, the music to be played, the decorations for the wedding and the reception. Lily and James were overcome with the joyful excitement of being so relieved, so they happily took part in the preparations, taking a break from studying for the N.E.W.T.s for a little while.

They spent hours discussing Sirius' wedding outfit, who was still unsure whether he should opt for classic elegance or rather choose something fashionable. It was a big dilemma! James, of course, dressed classy, but Sirius was more offbeat, wanting to do things his own way. Obviously jeans were out as a choice, his family wouldn't forgive him for that. He decided to wear tight black patent leather trousers, a fitted white shirt with several rows of tiny ruffles at the fastening and a black open waistcoat. He decided that this would be the perfect combination of the two styles. For the wedding party he was going to spice up his look with jewellery - several rows of chains, some

with cross-shaped and cameo pendants. He didn't buy anything new, he already had every piece of this clothing in his wardrobe.

Once this was decided he took care of the next business, and the next, and his friends watched with pleasure as Sirius began to enjoy life again. It was obvious that later on he would have to face the problems which would certainly arise after the marriage, but for the time being he did not think about this.

Sirius's delirious joy at preparing for the wedding disturbed him with a thought that had been bothering him, one that would not allow itself to be buried under layers of others. He wondered if Remus had heard of this decree, and if so, what he thought. Did he hope Sirius would also be cast out and stripped of his magic? Possibly, he had no reason not to feel that way. Such thoughts caused pain, but he deserved it, it should hurt. Still, despite himself, he hoped that in time he would be able to forget. If he let it consume him, he might as well not get married and immediately move to the Muggle world. No, as much as he regretted and was ashamed, he was not going to do it.

Now he was thinking about the honeymoon. It was obvious they wouldn't be able to go anywhere for long, but they could get away for a week, he was sure Snape already knew everything for his exams, and so did he, they could use some entertainment. Despite his early friendship with the Slytherin boy, Lily wasn't sure what he liked, or if there were any places that interested him more. She could only guess that he probably didn't like the heat. That didn't help much, but it was always something nonetheless. Thanks to this, Sirius knew that Malta, where the Potters were, was dropping out as a choice. He didn't really care what his future husband liked, but he wanted to make a good impression so that he wouldn't immediately think about divorce. These 10 years will be the longest of his life, he will probably get pustules on his lips from keeping up the false politeness, but it was still worth it. That's why he decided to do Snape a favour and choose something he would like. In the end, the choice fell on the Carpathian Mountains. None of them knew if it interested Snape in any way but it was a stunningly beautiful place with a rich, very fascinating history, something as close as possible to what Lily associated with being in his taste. Finally everything was ready and the only thing left to do was to wait for the wedding.

1978.06.02

The long, straight black hair gently waved in the light breeze that cooled the hot day. Sirius looked out of the corner of his eye at the boy standing next to him, officially already his husband. As far as was possible, Snape looked even paler and skinnier than before, with large shadows under his eyes that accentuated his unhealthy appearance. He definitely didn't look like a glowing spouse, that's for sure. Sirius certainly did, for a change. He didn't even want to think what his extended family and guests thought of it. What a terrible misunderstanding could have come out of this, it made him dizzy.

Amidst the deafening toasts, Sirius leaned over to Snape and whispered in his ear "pick up the knife, and start cutting the cake." He was met with a deep, cold stare from black eyes as his husband turned towards him and raised his face defiantly, as if to protest. Not thinking much, he quickly, fleetingly kissed him on the lips, which elicited an even bigger ovation, and a volley of laughter from James, and then, before Snape could start to make a scene, stood behind him grasped his hand and, holding his hand this way, gripped the knife. Again muttering in his ear "don't make a scene, just cut the cake, it's about to end" he began to cut the first slice with his and Snape's hand, all the while feeling the stiff, tense body in his arms. As he tilted his head above him he felt the black hair from the top of Snape's head tickle his nose.

An hour ago they had put their signatures to the marriage certificate at the Registry Office and now they had arrived at the Blacks' country estate, where they welcomed guests and accepted congratulations. Snape agreed reluctantly, and only on the condition that he could go from there quickly.

As Sirius had announced on Friday he waited for Snape immediately after the last lesson. He knew that he needed a moment to change out of his school uniform into his wedding clothes, put away his books, and prepare for the party. He also used this time for this purpose. Finally, Snape's skinny, energetic figure appeared on the dungeon steps. Sirius pressed his lips together in displeasure - yes, he had changed, he was no longer wearing the school robe, now he wore his everyday black robe, fitted at the top, flowing at the bottom. Zero effort, he had clearly put on the simplest clothes he could find. The Black family will be delighted, assessed Sirius with sarcasm. Robe made his morbid thinness even more apparent.

So you weren't joking when you talked about the dress, it's just a shame you chose black, Sirius laughed in the spirit, prudently didn't say a word about it, but together with Snape flooded to the Blacks' mansion.

No one from Snape's side came to the wedding. Sirius was surprised and even asked him if he had invited his parents, but Severus only mumbled something unintelligible. Well, it was strange, but such is probably the whole family, not just Severus, Sirius judged, and his own family is large enough for an audience.

The whole Black family and some of the guests were already waiting in the living room when they emerged, and there was a murmur of voices which immediately quieted when Walburga spoke. She gave a long, pompous speech, interspersed with subtle malice, which Sirius completely ignored, and Regulus listened attentively, as if she were speaking some unknown wisdom. As far as Sirius could tell, his fiancé and his younger brother did not have much in common, apart from the House to which they belonged. But then again, Snape didn't have much in common with basically anyone except, formerly, Lily of course. Typical outcast. And now he didn't even look in

her direction. Stubborn little bastard.

But it was an advantage in this case; he would have hated it if Snape had confided in Regulus and Regulus had spread rumours and updated the family on everything. Who knows, maybe he would even visit them regularly! Ugh, horrible thought.

The sharp voice of his mother brought him back to the present. Yes, yes, mummy, whatever, finish the show already for the unsuspecting guests. Sirius discreetly rolled his eyes, disguising this by brushing back a strand of hair that had escaped from his lengthy fringe, and then glanced at Snape, who as always had an impenetrably indifferent look on his face, Sirius, however, thought he had picked up on any hints about himself. When Walburga finally stopped talking, Sirius was approached by James and Lily and Snape by Lucius. What a relief!

Chatting merrily, accompanied by the guests, they went to the Registry Office, where without further ado they signed the necessary documents, and exchanged wedding rings provided by the Black family. The wedding ring intended for Snape of course turned out to be too big and Sirius had to magically adjust its size.

For the first time Sirius touched his body in a non violent way. The white hand with its long bony fingers seemed so fragile that a firmer squeeze could have shattered it.

When it was Snape's turn to put the ring on him, for a brief moment it seemed he wouldn't do it, and then Sirius's heart stopped for a second, but finally, with a little hesitation and reluctance, trying to minimise physical contact, Snape managed to put it on him, which they celebrated with a champagne toast, served by the house elves.

Snape barely dipped his lips in his, Sirius gleefully drank the entire glass. Aware of the attentive eyes of the official in front of whom they were signing the marriage certificate, Sirius put his hand on his husband's palm for a moment and, leaning in, whispered in his ear "try to pretend a little", trying to make it look flirty and playful. Under his sudden touch, Snape twitched, then lifted his face and looked into Sirius' eyes with a slightly absent-minded look for a moment, as if he was having trouble remembering what he was participating in. Then, he smiled at Sirius with the very corners of his mouth. It was probably all he could accomplish, Sirius assessed. Flashed flashes, their wedding photos were taken.

Finally, the ceremony came to an end, the empty champagne glasses were taken away, and Snape went away talking to Lucius, in whose company he remained until they flooded to the wedding party.

Despite Snape running off to the company of Malfoy, Sirius did not suppose they were very friendly. Lucius was much older, they didn't have much in common, he estimated, a sentiment left over from when Malfoy attended Hogwarts. But it was better than nothing, better a distant acquaintance than none at all. In any case, Sirius' parents were pleased at least with the choice of him as a best man.

The Blacks' country estate was lavishly decorated, no doubt a small fortune had been spent on it. And this was to be a modest party, thought Sirius with distaste. What would a lavish banquet look like then? The sheer size of the estate was staggering, everything was huge - a huge building with huge doors and huge windows. The house seemed only slightly smaller than Hogwarts. White shining marble everywhere, huge bouquets of mixed flowers stood in every corner of the building, huge crystal-heavy chandeliers hung from the ceiling, everything was in white and gold. A route led to the atrium, where the event was taking place, via moonlight gates at the top of the walkway, from which hung garlands of roses in various shades of pink and white, at the sight of which Snape muttered a curse under his breath.

There were round tables covered with white tablecloths and intricately carved golden chairs, each tied at the back with a large white bow. On each table there was also a vase with roses, not so big as not to interfere with the meal, but big enough to enhance the impression and small candles in glass shades. The table for the newlyweds had another garland of roses above it, the whole giving a very rich impression.

When everyone was finally assembled, a huge multi-tiered wedding cake was brought in, decorated with pale pink sugar roses, and there was an oooh and ahh of delight. Sirius looked with amusement at the increasingly sulky face of his husband. Apparently, this fool did not know how to relax and enjoy the moment. Well, his loss!

Now that the cake had been cut and the main part of the ceremony was behind them, he could relax and start having some serious fun. Sirius was so happy, he couldn't stop smiling like a madman the whole time, it was amazing, he had made it, he would stay in Wizarding World! Every now and then he reached for another glass of champagne, which he immediately drank, chatting with the guests, laughing with them, feeling light-hearted. He danced with almost everyone, except Snape, who, paying no attention to keeping up appearances, simply refused and no words of encouragement from the guests made him change his mind. After the first few dances, which he observed from his seat at the table, he squatted down to Lucius, to whom he muttered something in his ear, and the latter summoned one of Black's house elves. After a moment Snape got up and left the party, Sirius guessed he had gone to his bedroom. What a bore!

He himself stayed at the party late into the night, drank a sea of alcohol and ruined his shoes by dancing. As it got darker, the sky lit up with a multitude of luminous dots that looked like glow-worm, another decoration planned by the Black family. They clearly wanted to make the best possible impression, wanting to ensure that if people gossiped, it was only out of envy and not mockery.

When Sirius, finally tired of partying, retired to his bedroom, he was surprised to see Snape waiting for him, still dressed in his robe, just as angry, if not more so, than he had appeared while cutting the cake.

"Oh..." muttered a drunken Sirius. "Right, we share a bedroom." The thought amused him so much that he started laughing, which was met with a contemptuous raise of the eyebrows by the long-haired boy.

"Why are you sulking?" Sirius closed the door and walked over to the nearest chair and slumped heavily in it. He did not understand him, he himself was so happy that he felt like shouting with joy.

Snape jumped up in one swift movement, and leaned over him.

"What was that, Black?" Despite the close proximity, he shouted anyway and Sirius shrieked at the sudden, sharp sound. He could hardly hold back the impulse not to punch him in the face. What an angry bitch!

"What?" He asked not very intelligently, but he was too drunk and tired for word games and guessing.

"That kiss by the cake! I didn't agree to it!" Snape face reddened with anger as he almost screamed. The seated man began to laugh, causing Snape to fall silent in astonishment and move away. Good enough, Sirius assessed.

"Is that why you stay up half the night and wait for me?" Without stopping to laugh he threw his head back. Finally he stopped and looked at his exasperated husband. At least the absent-minded expression was gone from his eyes, now he was definitely alerted.

"You know we're going to be doing a lot more than just kissing, right?" His speech was quite drawn out.

"First of all, no, we're not going to kiss." This time Snape didn't shout. He crossed his arms over his chest and spoke in a measured, cold voice. "Secondly, whatever we're not going to do, it's only

going to be by prior arrangement, after I've given my consent." He managed to wrap as much contempt in his words as he could manage.

"Oh..." Sirius tilted his head, suddenly remembering why he hated the boy standing in front of him so much, and his good mood suddenly evaporated. Snape was going to be an annoying bitch from day one of their marriage.

"For what reason do you think you're going to be the one to decide?" He felt a growing rage. He instantly rose from his seat and reached Snape, whose eyes widened for a moment.

He shoved Sirius hard, pushing him away from him, hollering "get back in your seat, Black!".

Sirius took advantage of this to discreetly grab his wand while falling back into his seat.

"Expelliarmus, motherfucker!" And once again launched himself at Snape, this time falling on top of him with all his weight and knocking him over.

All the weight of the fall went to Snape, who hit the floor hard. "Uhhh," he shoved Sirius off him, and sprang to his feet. "You fucking drunken idiot!" Although he had certainly hit himself he showed no pain.

Sirius rose to his knees, then straightened up. For a moment they stood, looking at each other with hatred before Sirius, in a lightning quick motion, grabbed Snape by the forearm and threw him onto the bed, landing on him a moment later. In that moment he cared for nothing, nothing mattered but his hatred.

All the hatred he felt for him, all the resentment suddenly sprang to life and exploded with tremendous power. The last months of the ceasefire have disappeared, evaporated as if they never existed, the gratitude and relief gone, the pure, red-hot hatred left. Sirius wanted to humble him, to win him over, to force him to acknowledge his weakness and defeat.

No more false politeness, no more putting up with mood changes and violent emotions. This time he wanted to show him who was in charge.

The mattress rippled beneath them as they struggled for a while on a white silk bedding, made especially for the night, and this time Snape was unable to throw off Sirius' weight. He was jerking and scrambling like crazy, panting, trying to get out from under the crushing weight of his newly wedded spouse, but got nowhere.

Eventually Sirius managed to land between the Slytherin boy's legs and at the same time grabbed his wrists and immobilised them above his head.

From a face flushed with anger, black eyes looked at him with hatred, black tousled hair lay around the defeated boy.

The fight unleashed something in Sirius that he did not even expect to have in him, it had a stimulating effect on him. Although moments ago he had only felt rage, now he began to feel lust as well. He had never before associated violence with sex, but now he felt an irresistible desire to show Severus where he belonged, like the bitch he was.

"It's our wedding night, LOVE, I don't think you're going to say no to your husband." Sirius hissed with contempt and mockery directly into Snape's angry face. Despite the situation the smaller man found himself in, nothing in him suggested fear. The only thing that showed that he was aware of what was happening was his accelerated breathing.

Sirius, without waiting for an answer, lowered his face and began kissing him on the neck, occasionally biting the delicate, thin skin, which was sure to leave marks. Precautiously, he didn't kiss his lips, not wanting to risk being bitten, instead concentrating on his jaw, neck and nape, as that was all that was accessible from under the highly buttoned robe. Surprisingly, Snape suddenly abandoned the fight, and lay motionless beneath it, not defending himself.

The longer Sirius kissed and nibbled his flesh the more relaxed he seemed. Good, assessed Sirius, meaning the bitch is in the mood for sex. Clearly, the fight has warmed up more than just him!

Finally, as Snape's body became completely relaxed and his breathing calmed Sirius decided to take a chance and carefully let go of his wrists. Nothing happened, Snape still lay beneath him and allowed himself to be kissed, he even tilted his head slightly, giving Sirius more room for his demonstrations, his long hair scattered like a black veil on a pillow. He was clearly resigned to his fate and wanted to complete all ...umm... "formalities".

Sirius has gained confidence, not only has he tamed the bitch and shown him who is in charge, but on top of that the condition of marriage will be fulfilled. It could not be better! He returned to his occupation with redoubled enthusiasm, trying to lift the robe of the boy lying beneath him. Suddenly he felt a strong blow on his head and darkness followed.

When he woke up, he was lying in his clothes on the bed, there was no one in the room except him. For some reason he was wet, the bed around him was also wet, and everywhere there were crumpled roses. He touched the wetness with hand and smelled the hand - fortunately, he has not drunkenly peed into the bed.

He felt a headache. Carefully, so as not to aggravate the pain, he raised his hand and felt the sore spot. Blood. He had been hit on the head with something. A quick glance at the floor revealed the tool - a broken vase lay there. The harsh light coming from the window made him realise that it was already morning, he had slept through the night. Memories slowly returned. Oh... It seems he tried to rape Snape! Horror overwhelmed him, the blood drained from his face. What a shame! For a moment he sat with his face hidden in his hands. It's not me, he consoled himself, it's the alcohol. Yes, it was the alcohol's fault, he would never drink again he promised himself. He struggled to get out of bed, showered, cleaned up his appearance. Now he would have to seek out Snape and talk to him. He hoped he hadn't already run screaming to annul the marriage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Crushed by fear, guilt and shame, Sirius, trying not to arouse suspicion, searched all over the house and garden, occasionally coming across wedding guests with whom he kindly exchanged a few words, but nowhere did he find Snape. All those decorations, the jolly guests, the whole atmosphere of celebration mocking him, mocking his failure, got on his nerves.

Luckily he managed to slip past his parents and that mummy's boy Regulus unnoticed, useless talking with them was just what he would need now. It was not easy at the same time to look for Snape in all the crowd of guests who came for breakfast and at the same time to behave in such a way as not to arouse interest.

Damn it, this idiot can't do anything to avoid making a fuss about himself, he mused, being close to hysterics. Although it was hard to say who was the bigger idiot making a fuss about himself in this situation, he judged tartly. Finally, he gave up and summoned Kreacher.

"Have you seen Snape anywhere?" He tried not to show any emotion, to save at least what remnants of dignity he had left.

"Kreacher saw Severus Snape come out of his bedroom in the middle of the night and flooded himself, sir." The small shrunken creature bowed his head for a moment. "Kreacher doesn't know where to, sir."

"Thank you Kreacher."

Sirius folded his hands behind his back for a moment. So that's it, Snape hasn't been here for a few hours...Possibly they're already divorced. Oh well, you've messed up, Sirius, he reproved himself in thought.

Where could he have gone? After he'd already been to the registry office to cancel the marriage, of course. Maybe he could persuade him to get married again, quietly. Again, he felt terror pour over him like cold water, taking his breath away. And he was already so close to his goal! That he'd had to get drunk, too, and screw up so damn badly! If Snape agreed again, he would never again say anything rude to him, not even think anything like that, Sirius bargained with fate in his mind.

In the end he decided on the most obvious choice and flooded himself to Hogwarts. Here again he had to go through the humiliating scene of looking for Snape and asking a house Elf about him. Turns out Snape is in the library. What a surprise, who would have expected it, he judged with irony, all in all he could have used his brain and come up with it himself.

The closer he got to the library the heavier on his soul he felt. He had to take responsibility for his actions and face Snape. And all this while he was still hungover.

Snape was sitting in exactly the same place as before, obviously in front of a clash of books and with one open in front of his nose. He was dressed in his school robe, nothing in his appearance suggested that he got married yesterday and almost fell victim to marital rape. Sirius felt himself blush with shame. For a moment, with his face burning, he wondered if he had left any bruises on his body. Nothing was visible from under his buttoned-up collar and cuffs. Only Snape dressed this way in full summer, never wearing short sleeves, always hiding every bit of skin that could be hidden.

Now he had reason to do so, Sirius judged with bitter irony, he had a violent husband.

Sirius strained his memory, trying to summon up those revolting memories. His mind recalled the

sight of a boy trying to free himself, struggling, skinny, so much smaller than him, with a focused, fierce face and his own strong, muscular arms holding him in place.

Yes, apart from his wrists there was definitely bruising on his hip bones. Sirius has already managed to notice that Severus bruises like a peach, a firmer touch and he turns purple. Perhaps it was something with his blood system? Sirius did not know, but the fact was there.

Surely now he had evidence of Sirius' "passion" all over his body...What a shame! It wasn't him, Sirius convinced himself, he's not like that. It was an alcohol and hate, that's all. He did not even want to think what his family would think. Although, who knows, maybe now they would finally accept him and recognise him as the rightful bearer of the Black name, he thought with sarcasm. They do, after all, still believe that the mythical Voldemort will return and liberate the Wizards from the Muggles, so presumably his behaviour would be appreciated. Snape was a halfblood after all .

He closed his eyes for a second and breathed deeply, trying to calm himself.

At last, when he had gained strength, he opened them. Suddenly his gaze was caught by the movement of Snape's hand as he, completely ignoring Sirius' presence, turned a page in his book. Sirius squinted. Yes, he was not wrong! For a moment his heart stopped beating when he saw a wedding ring on Severus' hand. So all was not yet lost, he still had a chance! He glanced around the room filled with thousands of books, which he felt created quite an overwhelming atmosphere. This was not his natural habitat. For Snape it undoubtedly was; it seemed that the library was his second home.

He grunted, trying to gain the attention of the reading boy, but to no avail. All right, Snape had a right to be offended, for once in his life it was justified.

"Severus..." He began cautiously. "That wedding ring on your hand...Haven't you applied for a marriage annulment?" Sirius carefully followed every slightest grimace on his husband's face, watched as thin eyelids fluttered slightly.

Snape flipped the page again, his eyes intently following the contents. Finally, he spoke up.

"No, why should I?" His voice was indifferent, even bored, as if Snape did not understand the reason Sirius was bothering him.

Sirius's heart began to beat harder. He didn't understand any of this. Had Snape also been drunk last night? He hadn't noticed anything like that, but on the other hand, he wasn't looking. There was no turning back now, he decided to continue.

"That situation yesterday...when I was drunk..."

He had never felt so embarrassed as he was now, so he stammered unsuccessfully, unable to find the words. "I didn't really mean to, you know..." He flexed his fingers nervously and bit his lip. Snape lifted his head from the book for a second, his face expressing nothing, but Sirius could see that the dark circles under his eyes were even bigger. It almost looked as if his eyes were blackened. He had definitely not slept for a few nights.

"I know it was a show of strength, I do not suspect you of an outburst of passion. You probably didn't understand what you were doing yourself, as you usually do..." He didn't even try to hide his contempt at the last sentence. "No worries, you didn't traumatise me for life." He rolled his eyes. "You haven't traumatised me at all." He added in an indifferent tone and returned to his reading.

"Were you not shocked?" Sirius's voice quivered slightly when he tried to wrap his mind around what he was hearing.

"Why should I be?" He didn't even stop reading for a moment. "You behaved roughly as could be expected of you. I know what you are like and I know what to expect from you. I know what kind of relationship I've entered into." The voice was cold and indifferent, not even accusatory, just stating how the situation was, as if it were obvious.

This felt like a punch in the face. He'd probably rather deal with a terrified Snape than hear that

attempted rape was behaviour expected of him.

If he had thought before that he couldn't feel any more humiliated, he knew now that he had been wrong. Snape's cold gaze and even colder words made him flooded with a hot feeling of shame, so burning that he felt like he would completely melt.

This indifference, this lack of surprise.... It was too much for Sirius. He didn't know how much of this was a pose of indifference and contempt and what Snape really felt. It was possible that he was terrified to the point of madness when they sat so close together, alone, in a closed room, far from people. And it was possible that he was as cold-blooded and thick-skinned as he portrayed himself. Sirius did not know. He tried, at least a little, to repair the bad impression.

"Severus... I'm sorry." He muttered with his eyes fixed on the ground. "Even if this is what you think of me and expect, it will never happen again."

Snape shrugged his shoulders. "If you say so..." And that was that, nothing more. Sirius clenched his teeth, he couldn't afford to lose control now.

"Did you eat breakfast? You left so early..."

Severus looked at him as if Sirius had grown a second head. "What kind of stupid question is that, Black?"

Obviously, absolutely nothing can be discussed with him that is not strictly connected with the conclusion of this marriage. Snape will do anything to make a point and put him in his place.

"We are scheduled to leave this afternoon for our honeymoon, in the Carpathians." Sirius hoped that would make the boy soft.

"Without me. I'm studying for my exams." Apparently he decided he wasn't mean enough, because he added. "That's my last word."

There was nothing left to do but acknowledge his failure. Sirius turned and left.

How did it happen, how could the catastrophe come so quickly? Just yesterday everything seemed so easy, so obvious, they got married so all their problems were gone, right? They would just exist side by side for ten years, seeing each other as seldom as possible, having sex once a month, normally, like with a fleeting hook up, and time would pass and pass and in a moment they would be free. It seemed very easy to do. So why did he have to drink too much alcohol and why did Snape have to provoke him by pushing all the buttons to make him lose control? Snape was to blame himself for them beating each other up, only the attempted rape was one hundred percent Sirius' fault. He sighed heavily. He didn't know this side of him, that's for sure. Would it always be like this again, would he always have to be on his guard to avoid losing his temper?

In a gloomy mood, he returned to Black's country estate, where the wedding guests were still staying, about to look for his friends. He found them, unaware of the disaster that had occurred, in the dining room, where, as if to spite him, they were talking to Lucius and Narcissa. At least Regulus, that mamma's boy and lickspittle, wasn't with them, he judged, he wouldn't put up with his sneering looks and comments.

"Ah, Sirius!" Lily was pleased to see him. "Where is Severus?" Sirius didn't think at all that she cared so much about meeting the sullen boy; she had asked about him out of politeness, but the damage was done; Lucius lifted his head from above his plate and also began to look for Snape with his eyes. Sirius decided that the truth was better than a lie, or at least part of the truth.

"Severus returned to Hogwarts to study for his exams. He refused to be persuaded." He spread his hands to emphasise his helplessness. "It seems we won't be going to honeymoon either, he doesn't want to waste the time he could be spending studying."

Lucius looked at him gravely, then apologised to those gathered and left, no doubt to go to Hogwarts and check on Snape.

What a bummer! No telling what he will say to him! God...

Just what was missing. Disheartened, he squatted at a table with his friends and Narcissa, who finished her meal and culturally said goodbye, saying she wanted to talk to her sister.

James and Lily watched worriedly as Sirius summoned a house elf, asked for a bottle of wine and when he got it, he picked it up and poured himself a full glass, which he drank straight away.

"Peter and his wife have already returned to Hogwarts." James informed. For a moment he waited for some sort of explanation from Sirius.

"What is it?" He finally couldn't stand it. "Something happened last night?"

Sirius could only nod sadly. Lily and her husband exchanged glances.

"I don't suppose it has anything to do with the wedding night? Right?" Lily's voice quivered slightly with stress.

Sirius said nothing, just took another sip of wine, it helped his hangover.

"I told you the issue of consummating the marriage would be a problem." James shook his head.

"What went wrong?"

Sirius slumped heavily in his chair. He felt absolutely drained of energy.

"Everything," he sighed heavily. "Yes, you said, but what other choice did I have?" Although he didn't mean it, there was a hint of accusation in his voice.

James ducked his head. "You're right, I'm sorry." He reached out and apologetically patted him on the knee. "Are you going to say anything more about how the night went?"

Sirius, if he had a choice he would rather die than do this but he didn't have one.

"When I came into the room he immediately started arguing. He just jumped in my face and screamed and screamed. Eventually I had enough... In the end we beat each other up. "He stopped for a moment and poured himself more wine. "And then I tried to force him to have sex." The word "rape" didn't cross his throat, he knew they would understand anyway. He straightened up in his chair and hid his face, burning with shame, in his hands. Even without looking at them he was aware of their shocked looks. It is one thing to tease a bastard, or even to beat him up, but an attempted rape is something over the line.

"But you didn't, did you?" Lily's voice was strangely high-pitched, not sounding like hers, a desperate hope lurking in it.

Sirius shook his head. "No, I didn't." He lowered his hand and tapped his fingers nervously on the table. The second part of his statement refused to pass. Finally, he grunted. "The only reason it didn't happen was because he hit me over the head with a vase. Very cliché, isn't it?" He laughed a sad, resigned laugh. Apart from the "oh fuck" that ripped through James, no one said anything. Silence fell, disrupted only by the tapping of Sirius' fingers on the table.

Finally James spoke up.

"What is your situation now? Have you spoken to him?"

"Oh yes!" Sirius laughed again with a bitter laugh. "He said he wasn't surprised by my behaviour because he expected it of me." He lifted his head and looked James in the eye. "Do you understand? He said he expected me to be a rapist! He expected being abused in marriage and yet agreed." He exclaimed, got to his feet and started pacing nervously around the dining room. It definitely didn't look good.

"But he won't be, will he?" Lily finally asked.

Sirius sent her a look. "Of course not! He'll be completely safe, no harm will come to him, it's a one-off situation...I wonder what he'll say to Lucius.... Will he try to completely destroy what's left of my reputation or will he just hold it against me."

"You married a snake..." Potter muttered. James, always supporting him, even when Sirius was wrong.

At this point Lily interjected. "Oi, what you're saying is unfair! In this case, it's not Sev's fault!" Sirius noticed with horror that, despite trying to hide it, she was crying.

Further conversation was interrupted by some wedding guests who entered the dining room. Sirius calmed down and assumed a nonchalant pose, for anything in the world he didn't want anyone to realise that he was in further trouble.

"I'm going back to Hogwarts." And with a light step he left the room, Lily and James following him, James embracing Lily by the arm, in a clumsy attempt to comfort her.

At Hogwarts they made their way to the Gryffindor boys common room. Sirius didn't want to run into Snape now. Fortunately, despite these concluded marriages, couples were not forced to change rooms and live with each other, it would probably have made more fuss than it was worth. He felt better in the common room, knowing every detail of the room that had been his home for the last few years gave him a sense of security.

Shortly after them, Peter walked in there. They quickly introduced him to the situation, then sat and discussed the losses. The worst part was that Sirius would have to get into bed with Snape anyway. Even before, this would have made the situation difficult and awkward and was not one of the most pleasant ideas to spend time on but now it had become a thousand times worse. Sirius did not even want to think about it. He will have to do it with a boy, probably hetero, without any experience and on top of that with someone he tried to rape drunk. He was sure that his husband would not facilitate the whole situation, unpleasant for both of them. Fucking Ministry with their fucking marriage laws and sticking their noses into things as private as someone's sexuality!

Sirius hadn't found out if or what Snape had told Lucius about their wedding night, but as he hadn't heard any accusations from his cousin, he figured they probably hadn't found out too much. Apparently Snape wasn't so keen to talk about the incident. Phew, at least he was spared that, at least for now.

Having no choice, and hoping this wouldn't reach Black's ears, Sirius took care of the formalities and cancelled the plane tickets and room reservations at a lovely hotel in the Carpathian Mountains. And he had tried so hard to accommodate Snape's tastes so the silly lad could enjoy the trip, but no, Snape would never appreciate anything. Huh. He wanted to go there too, climbing surrounded by beautiful views would do him good. Maybe another time.

For the first week of their marriage, they hardly saw each other, except when they were in classes together. Sirius although he tried not to show it all the time was crushed by a sense of shame and grief, Lily slightly avoided him, which was understandable and obvious, but she did not do it demonstratively, James supported him as always. Sirius was curious when he too would see what a monster he was.

Snape was constantly repeating material for exams, even though Sirius was sure he knew all the books by heart. He also took it more seriously, now his N.E.W.T.s results mattered. The situation persisted until the day of examinations. It was only when the adrenaline had subsided, when everything they could do had been done and now they only had to wait for the results of their hard work that Sirius realised they still had two weeks to consummate their marriage, otherwise it would be annulled. Damn it!

The section from Sirius' POV has passed the halfway point.
Severus' POV begins with the 11th chapter.

1978.06.15

The very thought that he would approach Snape and broach the subject gave him a migraine. It was unbelievable how badly this boy was affecting his wellbeing and self-esteem. Sirius was sometimes so ashamed that he would not leave the Gryffindor common room except at times when it was required of him. If Sirius thought his situation had been poor before, he now knew that his current situation was worse. He hoped that Snape, in a fit of rage, would decide not to say anything to that mummy Regulus, and so the rotter was sure to report everything to Mummy. The only consolation was that his parents knew perfectly well that it was not the needs of the heart that prompted Sirius to marry, but necessity, so the lack of interaction between the spouses should not surprise them.

Because what could be said could be said, but the relationship between him and Severus was nonexistent. Zero, nothing.

They didn't speak to each other, they avoided each other, and Sirius wouldn't have minded if it stayed that way.

The day after his exams, at breakfast, he realised that the end of the school year was in a fortnight' time, which meant that Snape was not only going to sleep with him before then, but also move in with him afterwards. It immediately took all his appetite away. As he sipped his coffee, he glanced at the table where the Slytherins were sitting, and among them caught sight of his husband, who was also not eating, but drinking coffee.

His sharp profile stood out very much from the others. Somehow Snape seemed even thinner, as if he had lost a few kilos since his marriage, and even then he was definitely clearly underweight. He had never been fat, that's for sure, but now he looked like a skeleton held together only by tight skin, the shadows under his eyes visible even from this distance. His nose appeared even larger and his cheeks were sunken in such a way that lines formed around his mouth and his prominent cheekbones looked as if they were about to cut the skin. The aforementioned skin also looked even worse than before, it was all grey, with an unhealthy bluish tinge. His eyes appeared huge, in clearly visible sunken eye sockets, it seemed that the eyelids had become transparent and all the fat had disappeared from them. He appeared to be much older than 18 years, to appear worn out as if he was on the verge of death. Sirius surmised that most of the corpses looked healthier than him. He watched as a skeletal hand lifted a mug of coffee to his pale lips, and he shuddered at the sight. Snape's fingers were so skinny that every phalanx of bone was clearly visible, and the wedding ring seemed far too big. The movement of the hand caused the cuff of the shirt to drop and out of this appeared a wrist so skinny it seemed to be thin bone itself. He preferred not to imagine what the rest of his body looked like.

The thought of having to touch this skeleton gave him the creeps. There's no way his dick would get hard at the sight of it! This will be even more difficult than he had previously thought, who knows if it is even possible.

How Snape allowed himself to look like this was beyond Sirius' comprehension. Clearly the rumours circulating around Hogwarts had an effect on him. The other students had obviously noticed the sudden appearance of wedding rings in both of them, and it didn't take them long to connect the dots. From that moment on, everywhere one of them showed up was accompanied by a sea of curious stares and a flurry of whispers. Sirius was surprised that this had moved Snape so much, he should be used to it by now..unlike him!

He looked communicatively at James who followed his gaze and then watched as James' eyes widened in shock at the sight of Snape. Apparently he hadn't looked at him for a while either. As long as they were among the other students they didn't say anything about it, but in the common room of the Gryffindors it immediately came down to the subject.

"Oh gosh, what an abomination!" This time James didn't force himself to be falsely polite and immediately said what they were both thinking.

"Right?" Sirius paced around the room. "And I'm supposed to shag him? Like how?" He croaked with distaste. "He could die on me in the process!"

James laughed and chuckled. "Oi, that wouldn't be so bad, if you shagged him then the wedding would be valid, you'd just be the widower."

Now they were both laughing, amused by this vision. For a moment they were carefree teenagers again, fooling around. Neither of them thought that seriously, it was simply their way of coping with the shock. They sat on the floor and by the bed and, until the other Gryffindors came, dreamed up scenarios of what they would do with Snape's body.

"I've heard that the best way to cut the body into six pieces," began James.

"Why into six?"

James shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, but into six. "

Sirius started laughing and nodded. "Ok, so be it." He looked curiously at James. "What's next?"

James mused. "Next you can feed it to the pigs. You simply starve the pigs for a few days, they should then have a proper appetite." He shrugged his shoulders again. "Apparently they'll eat the body of a 100kg guy in eight minutes, and as Snape weighs half that they'd deal with it in a maximum of four minutes."

They started laughing again.

"It seems so simple! But I wouldn't be like that, I'd give him a proper funeral and bury him in the Black family vault, I wouldn't want to be suspected of murder."

The whole conversation was so absurd, so wonderful and familiar. Talking nonsense, making silly plans for the sheer pleasure of making them. Sirius missed such carefree moments so much, he clung to them, trying to keep them for at least a moment longer. The weight of the world overwhelmed him, he felt that if he managed to solve one problem, another and another would immediately fall on him, testing him only to leave him with nothing. Moments like the one with James kept him afloat, they were a safety valve for him, allowing him to let off steam to a safe level before the whole machinery stopped and exploded.

Not long after, an owl arrived with a message for Sirius.

He unfolded a short letter written in an unfamiliar handwriting, neat, slightly slanted.

"Meet me in the library."

Signed. "S.S-B"

Ha ha, very funny, assessed Sirius, meaning Snape is in the mood to tease him. It is possible that he noticed that he was being watched in the dining room.

"Speak of the devil! Snivellus wants to see me in the library. Let's just hope he doesn't want a quickie right there!"

He rose and moved towards the library, escorted away with a merry laugh and a good luck wish. Very good, thanks to that he himself will not have to initiate the conversation.

For a moment, Sirius stood before the closed door, gathering his strength for the conversation to come and the rest of his life. Slowly, he realised that although the decision to marry Snape had seemed to save him from a worse situation, it had only improved his situation for a short while. Now he would have to face the consequences of that and grow up. What he did on their wedding night should never have happened, and he was not going to let it happen again. But it wasn't easy to suddenly change his whole attitude and way of thinking, it had been too short a time for his first instinct at the sight of Snape not to want to hex him into oblivion. And now it was over, he had to learn the new rules immediately. Everything he did had consequences that would follow him if not for the rest of his life then for years. It was enough for him to be aware of what he had done to

Remus, to what extent he had destroyed his friend's life in a fit of mindless bravado and madness, for a joke, betraying Remus' biggest secret and risking his freedom and life. Then the deplorable situation with his drunken rage attack, which almost ended in rape, something he will be ashamed of for the rest of his life and which made him realise that he did not really know himself at all. We know ourselves only as far as we've been tested, they say. No, he definitely did not need to add more burdens to carry.

Now his responsibility was these 10 years of this marriage. With no reason to delay any longer, Sirius drew a deep breath and stepped inside.

This time Snape was not sitting in his usual chair. As Sirius entered the library, at the end of the room, he saw the emaciated, slightly hunched figure of a boy looking out of a window. Against the backdrop of a huge window, in a huge building, he seemed even more small and fragile.

The sight of it repelled him, he could not believe that this was what his future sexual partner looked like. He was about to bed date a death himself. Slowly, he closed his eyes and paused, needing to strengthen himself mentally. Snape acted as if he hadn't noticed his arrival so Sirius took advantage of this fact. Finally, he decided that he could not postpone it any longer, so he set off in his direction. Apart from them, there was no one in the library; it was not the most frequented place, especially now that the exams were over. No one would disturb them in this difficult conversation. Snape must surely have heard Sirius approaching, but he did not turn towards him, instead standing with his eyes fixed on some point outside the window. Sirius glanced in that direction, but saw nothing of interest, just trees in the square in front of Hogwarts, students walking around, some sitting, definitely not a sight worth noticing. Maybe he had died and frozen in that position? Sirius wouldn't even be particularly surprised by that. Even through his thin robe the sharp bones of his shoulders were visible, it looked awful even though the view was obscured by the fabric hiding the worst of it.

"There is less than two weeks to go. We need to get on with it soon, preferably this weekend."

Sirius almost jumped up in surprise when Snape suddenly spoke up. He didn't beat around the bush and went straight to the point, this Sirius had to give him credit for. It was said just like that, without a shadow of embarrassment. Perhaps he was more experienced than Lily knew?

"So... You're right, of course. Would you rather we went to Grimmauld Place or that I rented a hotel room?" For the first time in his life he felt stupid and embarrassed when he made a sexual arrangement, it was awful.

"Either way. What's the difference." If Snape was going to be as expressive in bed as his voice was now that they were discussing it, then Sirius might as well do it with a corpse, he thought with reluctance. Still, he did not show what he thought of it, he had already made a bad impression enough during their brief marriage.

"Very well." He declared with false enthusiasm. "Grimmauld Place, then. We can spend the whole weekend there, we'll go on Friday, you'll have some time to get acquainted with the house. By the way, you can take some of your stuff with you." All in all, this would solve the problem of Snape moving later.

"I don't want to live with your family." It wasn't a request, that's for sure. Snape was managing to push Sirius to the limits of his sanity at a really fast pace.

"Oh, you won't!" This problem, fortunately, was easy to deal with. "My family doesn't live there anymore. They moved out to an estate in Westminster. They wanted to be a bit closer to 'real life'." He tried to hide his disdain and irritation, but wasn't sure he succeeded. "In the house, apart from the house elves, we will be the only ones living there."

Sirius came closer so that he stood right next to his husband. Up close he looked even worse. His eyes reflected in the glass burned as if with a fever, his skin also had a strange, sickly sheen, as if

his whole body was consumed by some disease. The reflection in the glass looked like a skull. Sirius wondered if Snape had noticed it, and if so, what he thought of it.

"Severus..." Snape twitched slightly but did not speak. "I'm sure you noticed it, but you've gotten very thin."

Snape was still staring stubbornly at the window. "Good thing you pointed that out, Black, I wouldn't have noticed it myself!" There was an air of indifference in his voice, as if it wasn't even worth adding a sneer to it.

Sirius squirmed with dislike for a second but realised that he was reflected in the glass and Snape could see it so he quickly put on a neutral face.

"I see." He clenched his teeth tightly. He felt like grabbing him by the hair and smashing his face against the glass, but held back. Not now, in ten years, patience Sirius, patience. He was very frustrated.

Snape was driving him to the brink of madness! Why couldn't he behave normally, why did he always make everything difficult?

"Are you at all interested in men?" He tried again. It was actually a very important question.

"In what way is that your business?" Snape finally turned towards him and Sirius had to restrain himself by sheer force of will not to flinch. Anorexia nervosa, he reminded himself, that's what the disease is called. Perhaps that is the explanation for Snape's current state. After a moment, it occurred to him what Snape had said.

"In what way? After all, you're my husband, and we're going to have sex with each other this weekend! What kind of question is that anyway?" Sirius raised his hands for a second to grab him by the shoulders and shake him, but he held back again. He had to admit that he admired his self-control.

Silence reigned for a moment, broken only by the ticking of the clock. Snape meanwhile had resumed his previous position, again staring blankly out of the window.

"Yes, in what way? What does it matter, Black, it's not like we took this marriage out of the need of the heart or that my orientation will change anything about this planned sexual intercourse, right?"

The long speech had evidently robbed him of most of his strength, for his shoulders slumped slightly and his back bent even further. He leaned his palms against the windowsill and held himself up.

"I'd just rather know," Sirius looked at him intently, wondering if he should take him to Madam Pomfrey, Snape looked like he was about to pass out and Sirius didn't need the trouble. "I would prefer to know if you have any experience of this before we do anything."

Snape apparently decided that day to show Sirius to what extent he could be a stubborn, unreasonable arsehole. He was doing brilliantly!

"But you won't, we're not friends, Black. I'm not going to confide in you." He let go of the sill abruptly and moved away from the window. "I'll meet you tomorrow, after school." He stopped for a moment. "Ah, and I expect you to be sober." And he walked out with a sprightly step, his back firmly straight. There was not a trace of his weakness.

Sirius didn't know what game Snape was playing or for whom, but it was getting on his nerves a lot. Needing a moment's peace, Sirius sat down in the chair where Snape usually sat and began to consider the situation.

Ok, so Friday it is, this will give them a whole weekend to carry it out.

Sirius noticed that Severus, despite not wanting to make it obvious, did not like being alone in the same room with him. Whether this was because of their general shared past or because of the wedding night was unclear, but probably because of both. His suffocating sense of shame and self-

loathing was once again overpowering, so he tried to shake it off and tried to stir up his anger.

What a bitch!

To think that for a moment he was worried about his health! What a fool he was, from now on no sympathy, only indifference, with people of this nature it is impossible otherwise.

No wonder Snape had no sexual experience, looks are one thing, much uglier than him have lovers by the dozen, but that personality of his, that angry, irritating personality! Cold, repulsive, unpredictable, malicious, petty. The litany of his "qualities" could go on and on.

It would weed out even the most desperate! Sirius would never, NEVER even think of bedding him if not for this necessity.

Sirius felt that the burden of marriage fell primarily on him, and Snape simply let him take care of everything, let everything happen beside him, without being a part of it himself. The time of his carefree teenage years had passed, from now on his adult life was beginning, full of responsibility, whether he was ready for it or not.

He would have to decide what to do next, what to do with the rest of his life. And on top of that with Snape, for the next ten years...

He needed a drink, definitely, that can't be endured sober.

For a moment he considered going to James, Peter and Lily's, but gave up the idea. They probably wouldn't want to drink in the middle of the week, plus it was likely that his friends would soon be scared at the mere sight of him, knowing that all Sirius was currently doing was complaining. No, there was no point in even trying.

Three Broomsticks seems like the perfect place for people drowning their problems. Without even changing his clothes, he headed straight there.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Is that all you're taking with you?" Sirius looked at the small suitcase, frayed from old age and use, that stood next to Snape. They stood in front of the fireplace, preparing to flee to Grimmauld Place. When, a few minutes ago, Sirius saw a skeletal figure walking towards him carrying a suitcase which, despite its small size, seemed too heavy for him, he had to restrain his first impulse to run up and take the burden his husband was carrying from him. Not because he was concerned about him, but because it was a natural reflex for him.

Of course he didn't, he expected Snape would make a terrible fuss if he just tried, it wasn't worth it. Instead, he stood and watched as Snape tried to pretend that he wasn't weakened and everything was fine.

It certainly wasn't the easiest thing to do, as he already seemed tired. Yes, tired and sick. Why no one was interested in this until now Sirius did not understand. He looked as if he was dying walking! But probably because it was the end of their schooling at Hogwarts, everyone decided that it was no longer their problem, Snape could pass away as soon as he crossed the threshold, it was nobody's business.

And they were probably right, Snape's health was now his problem. Fuck my life, Sirius judged, he preferred not to think what his family would say if Snape started to look like this already at the wedding! There would be no end to the complaints and gossip!

And now he stood before him, on his, invisible from under the folds of the robe, thin stick-like legs, and he was all Sirius' duty, responsibility, symbol of the future life. Yes, the future did not look pretty. Damned Prague Ratter!

Snape's voice brought him back to the present.

"I've got everything I'll need right here." Snape pointed to his suitcase with a movement of his head. Possibly he had downsized the rest of his belongings and had them tucked away in a trunk in his pocket, who knows.

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. If that was the case, he wouldn't argue with him. He had hoped Snape would use this as a chance to ease his move, but of course not. This was Snape being Snape.

Moments later they emerged into the living room at Grimmauld Place. They were greeted by House Elves, who immediately offered to take Snape's luggage to his rooms, to which Snape agreed.

"If you wish, I will show you around the house and show you to your rooms." As befits a master of the house, Sirius tried to show complete hospitality.

"Your rooms are on the other side of the building, away from mine, so that we each have some privacy. But they are still on the same floor. They are fully furnished, with all necessary things. Of course you can change in decor whatever you want."

Snape nodded.

Ok, aren't you a little chatterbox today, Sirius thought with irony and set off, leading him from room to room, patiently explaining the purpose of each room. Snape listened, never interrupting. God, this is going to be a really hard day...

"Well, you seem to have seen all the most important rooms," Sirius decided that enough of this ordeal for now. "There will be dinner soon, if you wish you can freshen up before it in your bedroom." Though a few hours without his company is plenty. They had spent maybe 10 minutes

together today and Sirius perceived it as long hours. What an exhausting personality type this guy has!

Snape took up the offer and went to his rooms, presumably the tour of the house had exhausted him more than he showed it. Sirius hoped that he would gain strength before the evening.

An hour later, dinner was served, to which Snape came dressed in his everyday robe. Apparently he had adjusted his robe to his current measurements, for the garment was not too loose on him, perfectly accentuating his morbidly skinny figure.

Sirius, himself dressed in tight jeans and a shirt unbuttoned at the neck, with a multitude of beads and chains lying on his chest, raised an eyebrow but made no comment. Of course, his husband was a traditionalist, mentally in the 19th century.

The meal went on in silence, Snape seeming not to notice his presence, didn't even give him a second glance. Sirius noticed that he hardly ate anything, more rummaging with his fork through his food than taking it into his mouth. Well, he wasn't his parent, he couldn't make him eat. If he continues like this, he will damage his heart muscle or kidneys and then even surviving these ten years will be impossible for him.

Sirius wondered if that had been his aim. In fact, he doubted Snape was stupid to that extent. Yes, it would be a gift to Sirius, ensuring he kept his magic for a small cost, but Snape nevertheless seemed smarter than that, less emotionally driven. If this persisted too long Sirius would bring the doctor to him, even if he had to tie him up during the visit. God, why did it fall on him?

Snape pretended to eat for a while longer, then he finally put the cutlery down, signalling that he had finished his meal.

Rising from his seat, he announced "come and get me at 8pm, I don't want to wander around looking for your bedroom."

Sirius looked for a moment in the direction in which his silhouette had disappeared. He was one hundred percent sure that Snape had memorised the layout of the rooms exactly, so he didn't understand this comment about wandering. What was he pretending? Was he trying to make their meeting more romantic, or what?

His curiosity was satisfied when punctually at 8pm, after having bathed first, he knocked on Snape's room. A moment later the door opened and his husband appeared in it. But how! He seemed so drunk or high on something that he barely made contact. He wobbled almost immediately when he let Sirius in, managing not to fall down as he blindly caught the door. For a moment he stood still, still dressed as he was at dinner, trying to gather his strength and then went out into the corridor, immediately stumbling. Had it not been for the reflexes of Sirius, who instinctively held him down, he would have landed on his face. Sirius held him by the shoulders, straightened him up and leaned him against the wall to give him some support.

"What's that supposed to mean, Snape?!" This time he did not even try to hide his rage. Black eyes looked at him with a blank stare.

"You don't expect us to fuck while you're drunk to unconsciousness, do you?"

Snape's head drooped, long black hair hanging down past his face. Sirius had to hold him down again as Snape began to slide slightly downwards.

It took a while before he was able to speak. "What is the problem?" His tongue tangled a little.

"I'm not going to fuck someone unconscious!" Sirius was so frustrated that he shouted. "Who do you think I am!"

The skinny face slowly lifted, "that's what we established last time..."

Sirius twitched, with the remnants of a strong will restraining himself not to slap him.

"Ok, ok, that would be it." He pulled away from Snape. "You can think whatever you want about me, but in any case, we're not going to do this unless you're conscious."

He didn't smell any alcohol from him, so he guessed the idiot had probably prepared himself some sort of decoction to get high. "Go back to your place and sleep it off." Saying this, he grabbed him by the arm and in two big leaps basically dragged him to his room and then to the bedroom, where he threw him on the bed, then furiously went to his room. Unable to find a place for himself, he was pacing around the room. This idiot sabotages everything with his stupid behaviour! A little alcohol or potions to loosen him up would be ok, he would understand and even support it, but not being stoned to the point of unconsciousness! If it's going to look like this, it's not going to happen!

Eventually Sirius floored to Hogwarts, where he found his friends and told them how the situation was going. After hearing his grievances, they all went to Hogsmead to drown their problems in alcohol. Sirius returned to Grimmauld Place in the middle of the night and immediately went to bed.

The next day he woke up around midday with a hangover bursting through his head. He quickly drank the sobering potion Kreacher had brought him and felt better in a few minutes. Still lying in bed, he thought about the previous day. What a disaster! Snape had been given a beautifully furnished room, a sizable living room, bedroom, study, his own bathroom, and he looked at it all with equal enthusiasm as if he were to live in a broom closet. On top of that, instead of simply telling Sirius that he needed to have some liquid courage or something, he preferred to screw everything up. Heck, he could have even said nothing at all, just taken a little something to lift his mood. The Gryffindor hoped that after a refusal on his part, this time his stupid husband would be sober. After all, it wasn't as if Sirius was the only one who would benefit when their wedding was important; it should be just as important to Snape as it was to him.

They didn't meet until lunchtime. Snape again said nothing, but seemed annoyed. Well, you can blame it on yourself, assessed Sirius.

This time he also ate practically nothing and Sirius watched this with increasing irritation. Finally, he couldn't stand it. "Why aren't you eating?"

Snape lifted his face towards him and the candlelight highlighted every dimple and hollow, creating a grotesque sight. "I'm not hungry." He pushed the plate away from him. "I'd like to get this done as quickly as possible."

Sirius nodded. "Give me time to bathe and we can proceed. In about half an hour you can come to me" He looked him straight in the eye. "Be sober this time."

This time it was his turn to say it.

If Snape caught the irony of that, then by no means did he show it, just ignored the comment and simply left.

"God..." Sirius closed his eyes. He propped his head on his hands for a moment. Ok, Sirius, you can do this, he consoled himself in thought. He took a few deep breaths to calm himself and finished his meal.

After the bath, he did not bother to dress, simply wiped himself dry and put on his bathrobe. He figured that if he just tied a towel around his waist Snape might freak out, it might be too much for him for the first time.

He had made all the necessary preparations in advance so as not to make the situation even more embarrassing later on, he wanted everything to go relatively smoothly. I should be the one to get drunk, he thought ironically. He will have to use his imagination to get stiffy at all.

Half an hour later he let Snape in, this time sober. So he can do it if he wants to, he estimated. Very well!

With stiffly straightened arms, Snape entered the living room, trying not to look at Sirius once. He looked around the room, walked over to the sofa and sat down, not waiting for an invitation. Ok, assessed Sirius, well, I hope you have enough confidence.

He sat down beside him. "Would you like something to drink? "

Snape moved slightly away from him. "I want us to get it done and get it over with." A very serious, petite face lifted and black eyes met his grey ones for a moment.

Hmmm, that wasn't particularly encouraging behaviour, but I'll try to work with it, Sirius assessed, leaning over and kissing the Slytherin, pressing his lips to the tightly clamped ones underneath them.

Snape jumped back as if he had been scalded, his eyes widened. "What are you doing! I said no kissing!" He quickly wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

Sirius stared at him for a moment. "Tell me how you imagine it." He was careful in his choice of words, looking at Snape who seemed to be slowly panicking, though he tried hard to disguise it with a hard stare. "What should we do, step by step?" He tried not to lose his cool, if he got angry now nothing would come of it.

"Let's just get to the point." Clearly Snape was trying to make his voice even, and he almost succeeded.

Sirius noted with pleasure that the long-haired boy's cheeks had taken on a reddened hue and his breathing was beginning to accelerate.

So something can embarrass even you, after all, the ice queen. After a while, however, Sirius realised that it was possible that he was not ashamed but simply afraid, due to their less than perfect experience of their wedding night. Well, you messed it up, Sirius, you fix it, he said to himself in thought.

For a moment, he said nothing, allowing Snape to get himself under control.

"Let's just get to the point? You want me to just shove into you without any preparation?" Sirius raised an eyebrow. Does he even know what he is saying?

Snape twitched. "Who said you were going to be the one putting something in?" His voice sounded oddly thin. Although he tried not to show stress, his slightly clenched hands betrayed him.

"You have experience in this?"

The blush on Snape's face grew even deeper. A quick movement of his head was the answer to 'no'.

Well, you see, if you hadn't made a fool of yourself earlier, we'd have this conversation behind us now, Sirius assessed, but said nothing, trying not to make the situation worse.

"Severus..." Freezing into a stone mask a face turned towards him, the almond-shaped eyes seemed huge, too big for his narrow face, strangely glassy, staring but as if unseeing. Snape looked like he was in a strange kind of trance. Sirius felt like waving his hand in front of his face to see if he would react, but instead he tried to speak as calmly as possible. "I have no desire to let you experiment on me." He watched his face intently, trying to make it clear that he was serious. "I have experience and I know what to do to ...hmmmm... not hurt you. Ok? Do you understand?"

Snape, slightly pressed his lips together, looking like he was going to argue for the sake of arguing but gave up and just nodded slightly.

"Fine."

Phew, Sirius feared he was going to have to take longer trying to reason with this utterly fucked up lad. Life as Snape must have been difficult, that's for sure.

He knew he had to approach this very, very carefully, at least in this way of trying to rectify the situation. "I swear I will not hurt you and I will try to make things as easy as possible. If anything goes wrong, all you have to do is signal me and I'll stop right away." Sirius wasn't going to prolong the torment of his stupid husband, but he needed to be sure he knew what they were going to do.

"You need to be prepared, if you're not relaxed then I can't do this. Everything is going to be fine, I'll take care of you," he tempted.

His tone of voice was soft, low, gentle, without even a hint of pressure, purely informative and, even if one wanted to interpret it that way - caring.

Once more he leaned towards Snape, held him lightly by the jaw and kissed him. He didn't feel even the slightest bit of desire or interest in his future lover, and the fact that he had to put him through this, despite his obvious reluctance, didn't make it any better.

He was surprised by Severus' behaviour.

This situation with the attempted rape had to be the cause, there could be no other reason. Sirius knew he was attractive, some even said damn attractive, so it shouldn't have been so repulsive to anyone. What was different was Snape, he wasn't the most attractive of people, although as Sirius had to admit to himself, he wasn't ugly either, he just had a very disturbing type of beauty, perfect for the covers of fashion magazines in the Muggle world. Snape should have simply taken it as an opportunity to get laid, after all, sex is sex, and given his complete inexperience in the matter, he should have even seen it as a benefit of marriage, rather than acting as if he were about to be tortured.

This time Snape did not move away. His breathing was rapid, like that of a frightened rabbit, but Sirius hoped that the cause of his accelerated breathing would soon be different. He smiled slightly and ran his tongue over his lips, trying to slide inside, signalling that he wanted to deepen the kiss. "Come on, Severus, don't resist, give in," he urged him in thought, patiently waiting for some kind of reaction to his efforts. Slowly, with reluctance, the lips beneath him parted.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for the slow response to comments, I'm very happy with each one and it gives me motivation to keep trying.

Life is really getting to me at the moment. I'm glad this fanfic is pre-written, because I don't know if I could write anything at the moment.

1978.06.18

Sirius woke up with a hangover again, the painful pounding behind his eyes was splitting his head open. He hadn't planned to drink so much yesterday but there was no choice.

This time he didn't even have time to call Kreacher, just got out of bed and ran to the bathroom, aiming for the toilet at the last moment before he started vomiting. After a few rounds, he felt a little better. He washed his face, rinsed out his mouth, then brushed his teeth.

He wasn't sure if it was the amount of alcohol he had consumed or the memory of the previous night that triggered such a vomiting reflex in him, both were equally likely.

When a cold shower and sobering potion finally got him back on his feet, he quickly dressed and flooded to Hogwarts, hoping that James and Lily hadn't gone anywhere for the weekend. They hadn't mentioned anything about it yesterday, so he was of good cheer.

He hadn't said anything about it to Snape but had informed Kreacher, although he didn't think Snape would be looking for him. Sirius thought they both certainly appreciated today being a day when they would not see each other.

Memories of the previous night still haunted him and he needed a lot more alcohol to wash them away, although he didn't think there was so much of it that it could make him forget.

He was lucky, because James and Lily were expecting his visit so, as a precaution, they were not going anywhere. As soon as Sirius entered the Gryffindor common room James immediately ran up to him.

"Sirius! You look like shit!" He stared at him with wide eyes.

The description actually reflected perfectly how Sirius felt so he nodded his head in agreement.

"Did it work?"

Sirius began to laugh hysterically. "Oh yes! But how" He shook his head. "Oh, how fucking successful it was. Let's have a drink, I can't stand it sober."

James, still shocked by Sirius' appearance and behaviour immediately agreed.

A few beers later Sirius propped his head up on his hands. "God, that was a horrible experience, I don't know if I can do it again..." He stared blankly at the wooden table on which their tankards stood, as if seeking strength there. Finally he lifted his head and looked at James. "He's practically castrated me mentally!"

James squirmed at this statement, no one would want to experience such a thing. "Will you tell me about it?" Snape really had to do something extra to shock someone like Sirius!

Sirius nodded, and the events of the previous evening flashed before his eyes.

Kissing Snape was like licking something dead, which does not respond to being caressed with any gesture. The inside of his mouth had a fresh mint taste, which was a plus, but that was the end of the perks.

Not once did he reach out and reciprocate the caress, sitting stiffly with his hands resting on his knees, holding his robe in his hands, letting his head tilt back and be kissed. All the muscles of his body tensed, ready to escape. Sirius tried for a while longer to tempt him with movements of his tongue to copy his actions, before finally giving in. It was the least sexy situation he had ever been in.

What's wrong with you, Snape, he thought. Trying not to be discouraged, he dived lower and began to kiss his neck and nape, clearly feeling under his lips all the muscles, the vertebrae of his spine and the frantic throbbing of his pulse, at the same time undoing the buttons under his neck to get access to more skin. Sirius had a strong resolve to put him in a more sensual mood, it would make things a lot easier. Apart from inducing quickened, shallow breathing and an even quicker pulse, he managed to get nothing, Snape sitting as completely rigid as he had been before. Well, yes, he was stressed, that's obvious.

Eventually he stopped trying, instead standing up and walking over to the bar. "I think we should have a drink to loosen up, what do you think?" He tried to speak in a light tone so as not to show irritation.

Somehow even paler than before Snape nodded. He looked as if he was very cold; another moment and he would start to grind his teeth, eyes wide open, bottomless, expressionless like those of a doll. Sirius quickly prepared a glass of gin and tonic and handed one to Snape who, without thinking long, drank most of the contents straight away with a few sips, as if it were water. A moment later he turned in disgust and looked accusingly at the glass, as if the drink did not taste good to him on purpose. Sirius laughed. "You don't drink alcohol?" To his surprise, Snape simply nodded instead of throwing in some sarcastic comment.

"And how do you like it?" Sirius tried to keep the conversation going, but Snape didn't speak again, just finished his drink and set the glass down. As he sat there like that, with his hair parted across the middle of his head, framing his face like a black veil, his hands placed on his knees and his stiffly erect figure in a black robe Sirius thought of a Catholic nun. The thought amused him greatly, but he was sure Snape would not have been pleased with such a comparison.

"Would you like some more?" Sirius drank maybe a third of his portion, but Snape clearly needed more liquid courage. He wasn't going to get him drunk, of course, he didn't make strong drinks. "Yes." Although Snape was clearly trying to speak in a normal voice, Sirius noticed a slight tremor there. I'm becoming an expert on Snape, he laughed in spirit. This time Snape didn't drink it all at once, he took it in his mouth sip by sip, letting the alcohol warm his mouth. He was probably also trying to buy himself some time. Oh, Death, you shouldn't worry, I'm in no hurry for what lay ahead either.

Almond shaped black eyes gazed at the surface of the liquid in the crystal glass he held in his hand, as if expecting to see his future there, or perhaps the answers to unasked questions? It is difficult to say. In any case, apparently what he saw there was enough, for he drank it all in one gulp and turned to Sirius.

"I'm ready."

Sirius looked at him appraisingly for a moment, finally nodding. Every time Snape looked at him and noticed a piece of skin, whether it was on his chest or calf he looked like he was having a small heart attack. Was it possible that Snape was a latebloomer? It seemed so, judging by his strange reactions. Maybe you're ready for death, because you're certainly not ready for sex, Sirius assessed.

"Ok, let's go then." With a movement of his hand, he pointed to the bedroom door.

Snape stood up and walked to the door, hesitated for a second, then pushed it open and walked in, Sirius behind him.

His husband stood uncertainly in the middle of the room, not knowing what to do. Sirius approached him from behind, brushed back his hair, causing him to twitch nervously, and began to kiss his neck, at the same time he reached blindly for the buttons of his robe, fumbled for them and began to undo them. Snape's breathing quickened rapidly, but this was expected. Sirius held his jaw with his other hand, tilted it towards him and began kissing him on the face before finally descending with kisses to his lips, taking advantage of the moment when Snape drew breath and slipped his tongue in. With his right hand he undid 500 of the million buttons and reached halfway down his chest. Snape, as before, was completely passive under his touch, stiffened and unmanageable.

Sirius sighed in spirit. It was unfair that all the work had to fall on him! He went down with kisses and light bites on his jaw and neck and kept at it until all the buttons up to his hips were undone, then, trying not to lose patience, one by one he lifted his hands and undid the sleeve buttons. It felt like it was taking an hour. When he had finally finished, he moved to Snape's front and, still

kissing his neck and clavicles, slipped the robe from his stiffly lowered hands, letting it fall to the floor at the feet of his soon to be lover.

When he finally pulled back slightly and looked at him, it took his breath away, he couldn't breathe. Snape under the robe was naked, but that wasn't what made Sirius stand as if paralysed. He knew Snape was skinny, but the clothes masked to what extent. He had never seen anyone so skinny before! God, it was monstrous, he had never imagined it would look so awful! Snape's forearms and shoulders were the thickness of sticks, the widest point was the elbow joints, there were no muscles, just skin going over the bones. The chest was all ribs, each one very prominent. Then there was a sunken abdomen, sharply protruding hip bones and legs as skinny as arms. There were only bones, bones and bones everywhere. He looked like a skeleton, literally. Snape wasn't tall, 170cm was the max Sirius gave him, but they got it wrong with James, he didn't weigh 50kg, it was closer to 35-40kg.

Sirius had to use all his willpower not to jump away from him in disgust.

Although Snape's cheeks were beef red the black sunken eyes looked at him with mockery.

"Aren't you continuing to kiss me, Black?" Clearly Sirius' shock had given him confidence.

"What have you done..." Sirius struggled to get his voice out. This time he didn't hold back, he grabbed those bones Snape had instead of his normal human arms and shook him slightly. "What have you done!" He shouted before he realised what he was doing.

"What have I done?" Snape's voice sounded strangely hollow, Sirius didn't recognise it.

"Why!" He looked at the living skeleton and couldn't believe this was really happening.

"Why what?" A slight smile seemed to appear on his lips.

"Don't act crazy! How could you let this happen!" He grabbed his wrist and held it up to his face, as if Snape hadn't seen it before.

"You're so worried about me? How touching! We'll talk about that on another occasion, now let's get on with what we're here for." Snape hissed, simultaneously defiantly and mockingly. "Unless you can't handle it?" He raised one eyebrow.

Sirius wordlessly took him by the front of the arm, led him to the bed and seated him there, then pushed him lightly onto the flat and leaned over him. With one hand, he untied the strap of his bathrobe and slipped it off, allowing Snape to look at him. He, unlike his husband, was not a grotesque sight himself.

It was hard to tell if Snape appreciated his beauty because all he did was lay and staring at the ceiling. Very well, so be it, Sirius assessed, and reached for the small crystal bottle of oil he had prepared earlier for this purpose.

"Have you prepared yourself somehow for this?"

Snape, without looking at him, shook his head negatively, his black hair sharply set against the white of the silk bedding. As he lay stiffly stretched out like this, he seemed even more thin and worn out. A skeleton lying in a marital bed. Sirius was afraid to touch him harder lest he break one of what looked like very fragile bones.

'Okay, I'll use Scourgify now, unless you want to do it yourself.'

Snape said nothing but clenched his eyes tightly for a few seconds, finally opening them as before he stared blankly at the ceiling.

'There,' A poorly concealed weariness could be heard in his voice. It seemed that the boy lying beside him was already exhausted. So soon, mused Sirius, and they hadn't even started yet.

"Now I'm going to open you up, so don't be surprised if I stick my fingers in you." Sirius tried to guide him through it as best he could, explaining each gesture.

"Shut up, Black and just do it, will you?"

Sirius shrugged his shoulders, if Snape wanted it that way he wouldn't argue with him.

He tried to maintain his anger otherwise he might have broken down and started crying. This was

harder than he expected. He had the feeling that he was going to rape Snape and at the same time that he himself was going to be raped.

Disgusting, disgusting sex that neither of them wanted, and that would make them both feel dirty and leave them defeated, at least for this evening. There was no choice, it didn't matter what either of them felt or thought. No matter if they both started crying now, and calling their parents for help, if they wanted to keep their magic they had to do it. A very simple matter. Sirius took a breath, put a pillow under Snape's hips, lubed his fingers with his right hand, with his left hand he lifted one of Snape's legs, so very thin that Sirius could clearly feel the outline of bones and tendons, and bent it at the knee, tilting it at an angle, making room for himself and making it easier to access his body, and began to massage it lightly with his finger before just sliding his finger into it. He tried to do it as gently as possible, this devastated body with its thin, loose skin bruised immediately, all it took was a little harder touch.

Snape basically had no meat on buttocks, where in others there is flesh, in him there were sharp pelvic bones with large, deep hollows on the sides. The lack of flesh on these bones was very disturbing, Sirius felt as if he was touching someone terminally ill, perhaps even a corpse.

He wanted to scream in disgust, in shock and in protest, he was afraid to touch him, it would be so easy to hurt him. He wanted to cry, to make this damned idiot to eat, if only by force, to lock him in a room, tie him to this bed and feed him until all these bones were covered with at least a thin layer of meat.

Snape twitched but after a moment he became still again. Sirius opened him up patiently, slowly adding his fingers, giving him time to get used to it. All this time Snape was as quiet as if he had died. Sirius might as well have been preparing a rag doll, he would have received the same response.

He tried to imagine himself doing it to someone else, more attractive and willing, the other hand fondling himself and eventually got stiffy.

Finally he decided enough was enough, slid his fingers out of him, gripped his hips and entered him, or at least tried to. As soon as the head of the penis entered Snape stiffened even more and clenched. With his eyelids flickering over his closed eyes, he hissed through clenched teeth.

"Don't tighten your muscles! I can't enter you." Sirius tried to move carefully, but it was impossible, with those muscles clenching tightly around him. He felt a growing frustration, despite everything he didn't want to hurt this idiot.

Snape pulled down his eyebrows and clenched his eyelids even tighter. "Oh, shut up, I'm trying! It's an unconditional reaction!"

Sirius tried to move again, which was an almost impossible task, he was thrusting his hips forward slightly, sliding into him very slowly, in tiny lengths, when suddenly the muscles holding him back relaxed slightly and he entered fully.

"Uhh..." a stifled moan erupted from Snape's mouth twisted with a grimace of pain.

"Are you in pain?" Sirius knew it was a stupid question, he could clearly see it was, but he tried to get some contact with Snape.

"Shut up!" His husband hissed, his breathing became as fast as if he were hyperventilating, his hands clenched tightly digging his nails into the insides of his palms. Sirius gave him a moment to get used to it, then held him by the hips tested the angles, trying to hit his prostate.

"What are you doing?" Snape hissed in a breathless voice.

"I'm trying to make you feel good." Sirius wasn't sure how much longer he could manage to maintain his erection, Snape seemed under a lot of stress and in obvious pain, this was definitely

not conducive to the situation.

"It's irrelevant, just finish!" He hissed through clenched teeth.

Sirius nodded, though he knew Snape couldn't see it, and just started moving. Through the thin abdominal layers he could see something like the outline of his cock moving inside him, but maybe he just thought he was.

He felt disgusting, like he was raping someone, the whole experience was very unerotic. Every move he made brought a grimace of pain to Snape's face, and eventually tears began to flow. He was flacid the whole time, and his body was gently shaking.

God, if someone were to kill him now and free him from this torment Sirius would be very grateful. He couldn't believe that this was really happening, that it wasn't a nightmare. Snape had managed to turn sex, pleasure into a torture that Sirius already knew he would fear repeating. Finally, by some miracle, apparently the adrenaline kicked in, and he managed to finish, then immediately, as carefully as possible, slipped out of him.

Snape lay still for a moment, his chest would rise violently as he took a breath, then leapt from the bed, jumped violently which caused him to almost fall over, picked up his robe and without bothering to dress ran out of his bedroom. Sirius looked with horror at the blood smeared across his buttocks and thighs. He looked at the bedclothes; on the white of the silk a few dark red small spots of blood were very discernible. He jumped up from the bed, tugged at the sheet and dropped it to the floor. Feeling strangely unreal, he went to the bathroom and bathed, then returned to the room and drank himself into unconsciousness.

When Sirius finished telling the story there was silence for a long moment, James seemed as shocked as he was. Then he shook his head as if to shake off what he had heard.

"Oh fuck..."

Yes, Sirius agreed with that, it summed up his situation perfectly.

Chapter Summary

Thank you so much for giving me a chance and for all the comments and kudos!

This is the end of Sirius' POV.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sirius surmised that Snape had prepared some sort of healing potions and ointments for himself because he had returned to Hogwarts on Monday and was behaving as he always did.

Sirius watched him for a day or two until he finally decided he wasn't a coward and could talk to him. At the end of one lesson when everyone was gathering to leave he approached him.

'Meet me after class in the library, ok?'

Snape shrugged his shoulders, which Sirius took as agreement, and left.

Nevertheless, after the lessons he appeared in the agreed place, he was already there when Sirius came there, he was standing with his back turned to the entrance and it seemed that he was looking through books. When he heard light footsteps he turned around.

"Hey Severus." Sirius nodded to him in greeting, which Snape ignored.

"What is it?" He stood with his arms crossed over his chest. His posture definitely did not encourage conversation. Well, you'll have to put up with it somehow, Snape, Sirius assessed.

"How are you feeling?" Sirius stepped closer to his husband, who raised his chin defiantly.

"In what way is it your business?"

He met Sirius' eyes.

"I'd rather know if I didn't hurt you..." Sirius knew it sounded rather foolish, given their early relationship, but this question really bothered him.

He had never hurt his lover before, there had never been blood on anyone and the guys he had sex with were writhing in pleasure, not pain. It was a big blow to his male pride, it was hard to recover from something like that.

"Earlier you wanted to kill me and now you're concerned about my welfare? Don't be ridiculous!" Snape hissed contemptuously. "Back then you didn't care if anything happened to me, you didn't run around asking about my health!" His voice rang throughout the library as he shouted in frustration. "Leave me alone, Black, get away from me!!!" He sounded like he was on the verge of hysteria. "I did what was necessary, now leave me alone, don't talk to me, don't try to question me about anything, I hate you and I don't want to see you!" He almost howled with rage. When he had finished shouting he moved swiftly towards the door, passing Sirius, wishing to get rid of his company as soon as possible. He was unsuccessful, however, as Sirius grabbed him by the arm and stopped him.

"Stop. It doesn't work that way. You can rage all you want, but you know very well that we will have to go to bed with each other at least once a month. For that reason, it would probably be better if we had a civilised relationship, don't you think?"

Snape tried to jerk his arm away from him. "Now you want civilised behaviour?" With his other hand he tried to prop himself against Sirius' chest. "You're the one who made this situation like

this, it was up to you! You were the one who tried to kill me!" He jerked again, to no avail. "Let me go, Black, or I'll hex you!"

Instead of letting him go, Sirius grabbed his right hand, which Severus quickly lifted and held before Snape could reach for the wand.

In an attempt to soothe his angry, twisting and lashing out like a cat, husband, Sirius did something he never intended to do. He apologised to him. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry I did that, I'm sorry, do you hear? I'm sorry!"

Snape looked like he was going to spit in his face. "As hell you are! Yes, you're sorry for hurting Remus, but don't try to lie to me that you're sorry for me!"

He was jerking and writhing, throwing himself to all sides, shouting so loudly that Sirius was sure he could be heard in the corridor. He felt like covering his mouth to silence him.

Finally Snape stood still. "Let me go, or I will file for divorce."

Sirius smirked. "Would you waste all your self-sacrifice in this way? Then why did you go to bed with me?" He looked at the deepening blush on the emaciated face. "Speaking of which, there will probably be an inspection in about a week or two to see if the marriage has been consummated."

Snape's shoulders slumped. For a second he looked completely defeated, on top of this, it seemed that he had used up all his energy, he became even paler and small drops of sweat appeared on his forehead, it seemed that he would not be able to stand on his feet, and would fall down in a moment. Sirius let go of his wrist, and instead held him by the waist, walked him over to a chair and sat him down.

"Ok, I think that's enough for today. Get well." His longer presence there would not have improved the situation, so he withdrew, allowing Snape to recover in peace.

The inspection took place in a fortnight' time, the day after the end of their school year. They were both sent letters telling them where to report, on what day and at what time. During those two weeks they did not speak to each other, Snape avoided Sirius explicitly, he did not go to any lessons they had together, and Sirius did not impose on him because there was no reason.

Although attendance at the Leaving Feast at Hogwarts was not compulsory, both of them, without agreeing with each other, decided to attend, either by buying themselves some more time between friends, as in Sirius' case, or by procrastinating living in their husband's house, as in Severus'.

However, they gave up on a dramatic boat ride across the lake, neither of them particularly fancying it, and used the Floo instead.

Neither of them was in a hurry to live together, just the two of them. And so it was enough that, in order to retain at least a shadow of credibility as a couple, Severus had to sit next to Sirius during the feast. Luckily, on his other side sat James. Or at least it was lucky for Sirius, because Snape seemed even more sour in his company than in Sirius's alone. Who can understand the way he thinks, Sirius assessed with a shrug of his shoulders.

The end of his education at Hogwarts depressed Sirius greatly for some reason. He never thought he would miss it, and probably didn't. It wasn't about the learning, but about the time spent with friends, the carefree, teenage years. He was aware that this day was the final end of it all, and that although they would continue to meet in each other's company, everything would be different, slowly their lives would drift each in its own direction. Marriages, jobs, children, new friends. All this is normal, obvious and expected. So why did he feel such a strange tightness in his chest when he thought about it? When I got so sentimental, he mused, propped up with his elbow on the table,

with squinted eyes watching his amused friends. Just tonight, for the last time he would be a Gryffindor, for the last time they would all be together.

That evening Sirius drank himself almost to the point of unconsciousness. He didn't know who had escorted him to the Floo or how he had ended up in his bed.

The next day, when he finally got the hangover under control, he noticed that Snape apparently moved the rest of his things to Grimmauld Place when Sirius didn't see it. Kreacher confirmed him this. If Kreacher is to be believed, Snape also spent the night there before the official marriage validity check. He was probably the one who brought the drunk Sirius. Well, it doesn't matter. Now what mattered was going to the office to confirm the validity of the marriage.

James and Lily, as well as Peter and his wife, were given summonses at an earlier date, so Sirius knew what to expect.

Sirius didn't meet Snape until after breakfast, Snape had eaten his in his room. If he ate, of course. Sirius was already starting to get anxious waiting for him in the living room, and was wondering if he should send a house elf for him when Snape came in. He was wearing his robe again, but as he came closer, Sirius noticed that he had lost some of his ghastly leanness. He was still much slimmer than usual, but he had undoubtedly gained a few kilos since their night together.

Interesting. Sirius was sorely tempted to ask the reasons for this improvement, but having learned by experience, he knew Snape would not answer him.

Some time later, they flew there on Sirius flying motorbikes.

Snape was very reluctant to the idea, and at the sight of the motorbike he began to wrinkle his nose, but, as the nearest location to the Registry Office with Floo service was a few streets away, he simply relented, with a disgruntled look on his face, sat behind Sirius, put his arm around his waist and they took to the air. Sirius surmised that, hidden behind his back, he was looking down at the rapidly shifting landscapes below them, and must surely have ignored, with teeth clenched in exasperation, the fact that the breeze lifted his robe sometimes so that it waved in the air, and exposed his naked thighs, which Sirius could sometimes see out of the corner of his eye. Snape probably consoled himself with the thought that luckily no one had seen it, and when they arrived he quickly stood up and straightened his clothes on. Sirius parked the motorbike and they set off to their appointed destination.

They walked at a brisk pace, not talking, until they came upon a queue formed in front of the Registry building. Well, of course, they were not the only couple being inspected that day. Sirius once again made sure he had his marriage certificate and his ID card with him, then turned to Snape. "You took your ID card, didn't you?"

Snape rolled his eyes and did not reply. Sirius was sure that no one in the queue had as afflicted a spouse as he had. They approached the last couple in line and stood, waiting patiently for their turn when they could enter the building where they would magically scan them, checking to see if the marriage had been consummated and if, ironically, they were trying for a child. Most of the couples were heterosexual, of course, but there were also male-to-male and female-to-female couples. Sirius watched them closely, trying to guess the nature of their relationship. How many of the couples present here had married out of love and how many out of necessity? Were there others here so desperate that they married the enemy, someone they hated?

Although they had an appointment for a definite hour, when it came they did not move even to the half of the queue. The day was unseasonably hot, there was a searing heat unusual for their climate. The people were getting more and more irritated and tired, every now and then a murmur could be heard.

They had stood there for more than two hours, in the full sun. Sirius glanced at Snape, certainly the black clothes were not helping the situation. His pale face was covered in droplets of sweat, his lips almost as white as the rest of his face. They were in for at least a second wait, Sirius wasn't sure Snape could persevere. Fucking Ministry, they can't get anything done normally.

He looked again, Snape looked bad, much worse than in the morning. Sirius sighed in spirit. He leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"Severus."

Snape looked at him with weary, almost unconscious eyes, questioningly.

"There is no point in both of us standing here. Perhaps we should take turns waiting, me first, then you?" With a movement of his head, he discreetly pointed to the café and next to it the ice cream parlour across the street. There were quite a few people circulating there, but Sirius surmised that there was bound to be a vacant chair in either place. "Why don't you go there for now and then replace me?" Sirius continued to whisper, not at all keen to suggest the idea to the others until Snape was sitting in the chill.

Severus looked for a moment as if he was considering whether to argue or not, but luckily, as he rarely did, he made the right decision.

"Ok," he nodded.

Sirius, looking at his upright figure going where he indicated to him judged that it was done at the last moment, another moment and Snape might have fainted. Pallor was not a natural look in such heat, everyone around them was red from the heat, him included he supposed, so something was wrong.

Snape was clearly not used to the heat. If Sirius remembered correctly, he had come from the cold regions of Ireland or perhaps it was Wales? He wasn't sure, but it seemed to him to be from somewhere rainy. He himself had flown with his family on holidays all over the world, usually hot places like the south of Italy, Egypt, Malta, the Maldives or Thailand, and had coped with such weather incomparably better. Probably the fact that he was healthily nourished and hydrated, strong and fit also helped a lot. And to top it off, he prudently put on a white airy wifebeater and blue fitted jeans.

Snape returned less than an hour and a half later, looking much better, that is, for him.

Without a word he handed Sirius a large bottle of cold water. Sirius raised his eyebrow slightly but sipped under his husband's watchful gaze.

"Now it's my turn." Snape's voice sounded normal now too, the strength and malice was back there. Typical, wholesome Snape!

Sirius shrugged his shoulders but went on, knowing that any protests on his part would be met with a brawl.

Eventually it was their turn. Together they entered the building, handed in their documents, signed their names and then, just as James had warned, they were directed to a magic gate through which each of them had to pass. They had to stand there for several minutes while a device slowly scanned the body.

Snape went there first, proud, full of dignity, as if they weren't being checked like animals. He had apparently accepted that it was a necessity, nothing to argue with. Sirius was all the time internally agitating for such a violation of privacy.

The officials working there looked callous in his eyes, more like soldiers than state employees. As Severus approached, they seemed shocked by his thinness, but quickly picked themselves up. Huh, wimps, assessed Sirius, they had such shocked looks, and they hadn't even seen him naked, he thought with a sneer.

The whole place was designed to impress, large and unusually for Wizarding World, ascetically furnished.

When he, too, was finally scanned and it was deemed all right, the marriage was legal, the clerk stamped the certificate and reminded them to come again next year.

Finally...

Sirius stretched, stretching his bones. He looked at the shorter man.

"Why don't we go out for dinner somewhere? I know a couple of nice places where you can eat well."

Now that they didn't have to stand around so idly the weather no longer bothered him. All in all, it was the perfect day to sit somewhere in the garden of a restaurant and enjoy a cold beer.

"I'd rather not." Snape, as always, tried to ruin everything.

"Come on! You have no responsibilities, nothing to do, let's go!" Sirius, not caring about Snape's shock, patted him on the shoulder. "Oh, there's a nice restaurant here, I was in it two months ago, they serve great steaks!" Sirius decided not to let his good mood be ruined so easily.

He set off in that direction, and Snape reluctantly followed.

Once they had placed their order Snape put down the menu. "You're the one who thinks I don't have things to do."

Sirius looked up curiously.

"Oh?" He knew of nothing on the subject. "Are you going to say anything more?"

Snape bit his lower lip for a second.

"Actually, there's no reason to tell you anything, but since I've already started.... I'm looking for a place I can rent for my potions shop."

Ah, so Snape was going to work! Well, yes, he was hardly planning on marrying him and thus getting rich. Their orders were brought to them and, to Sirius' surprise, Snape ate quite normally.

"Why have you lost so much weight?" He revealed his petite figure with narrow shoulders with his eyes. Snape was still so skinny that he drew attention to his appearance everywhere. Sirius surmised that he was uncomfortable sitting on a hard chair, without any cushioning of flesh on his bones. For a moment he wondered whether to conjure him a cushion, but gave it up, he knew that it would end in a row and he just wanted to eat dinner.

"Marrying you is not the most pleasant of prospects." Snape picked up a glass of water and sipped. Narrow, wide lips curved downward for a moment. "You know, with someone who tried to kill you...It can take away the appetite, don't you think?"

He tilted his head slightly and stared at him intensely, as if it really was a question. "Then came the wedding night... It took my appetite away completely." He set the glass down and looked with his almond black eyes straight into his, a strange flame was glowing within them. "But now it's become a reality, all of it..." here he paused for a moment and grunted. "All the formalities have been completed, it has come to pass, the possibility of choice has gone. That's it."

Sirius clenched his teeth tightly. He couldn't wait for the ten years to pass, for them to divorce and for him to be free.

Chapter End Notes

End of part one.

Part two - 1980.10 - Severus

Chapter Summary

I hope I don't fail with the Severus part.

It was already dark outside, with only the lanterns illuminating the evening gloom, but the room was quiet and pleasantly warm, and it was bright and gave a feeling of security, and Severus slowly began to get used to it, although at first he felt very tense and uneasy here. It was strange, the realisation that he and Black were living together, and that at any moment there was a possibility that he was somewhere in that huge house at the moment Severus was hiding in his bedroom. After a few months, he slowly learned to treat Grimmauld Place as his temporary home and his bedroom became his asylum.

Shortly after his marriage, he managed to rent a small building on Diagon Alley, ideal for his needs. He used one part of it for an apothecary, another for a warehouse and a small laboratory, where he spent most of his time, when he was away from home.

As he usually did in his spare time, he sat at his spacious desk on which stood a neatly arranged pile of books and read, studying and preparing for the exams that awaited him. After graduating from Hogwarts, he decided it wasn't enough and wanted to continue his studies, so immediately he decided to take advanced courses under the tutelage of experts in almost every subject he was interested in, except spells. Here, there was nothing else he could learn, for he had been inventing his own for years. Every day he deepened his knowledge and never got tired of it, after all, knowledge takes no place.

His sharp and acute mind was constantly immersed in new and new subjects, topics, problems to be solved. 24 hours were not enough, he needed at least twice as much a day to be able to do everything that fascinated him, that he planned. Spells, potions, Muggle chemistry, physics, mathematics, herbalism and medicine, to name a few of his absorbing interests.

He was also fascinated by foreign languages, especially Latin, which sounded so elegant, so scientific, as if it had been specially invented for this purpose. Most Muggle inventors, scholars and scientists apparently thought so too, because all the old works were written in this language. Severus spent a long time learning it, until he finally mastered it to perfection. He then set about learning the Greek language.

When he came across a subject which interested him, he did not rest until he had explored it in depth, until he had learned everything there was to know. At that time, nothing could distract him from it, his passion consumed him completely, all he thought about was this, sleep was a waste of time.

On top of that, he loved to read, not only science books, although these constituted the lion's share of his reading, but also classics of literature Wizarding World and Muggles.

And Sirius asked him about something as irrelevant as his sexuality! Him! He was just thinking about the proportions of the next potion and Sirius asks him about such mundane things. Sexuality... He doubted whether he had any; he never devoted even five minutes to the issue.

Fortunately, apart from these regrettable situations, their paths did not cross too often. They usually

saw each other at breakfast, less often at lunch, never at dinner, Severus having too many pressing matters to dine at Grimmauld Place. He usually asked the house elves to prepare him sandwiches, which he ate in the evening and that was his supper. At first he made them himself, but Kreacher made a terrible lament, despairing that Severus did not like the food he was preparing, so Severus has since handed the job over to the elves.

In the most important respect Sirius did not lie, this Severus had to admit, in fact they hardly saw each other, except for family meetings and those moments once a month and Severus was all immersed in his studies, but sex was a monthly torment which Severus assumed was equally distressing for both parties.

They fulfilled the minimum amount of it mandated by law to count as 'trying for a child'.

At first Severus, still remembering the attempted rape, the drunken Sirius and his show of strength and even if Severus knew there was no real lust in it, but even rage would have been enough for the act.

He associated the alcohol-saturated drunken breath with his father, and the brutal violence with both his father and Sirius. A great combination, yuck!

Severus preferred to avoid such associations when it came to conjugal obligations. This stupid alcoholic whom he was forced to marry was ready to drive him into sexual disorder!

In order to help himself, he started to prepare a calming potion, and it worked, he just had to be careful not to take too much, because then Sirius would surely get angry and start arguing.

Unfortunately, Severus soon had to give it up when he noticed that it disturbed his concentration. He could not allow himself such a thing neither during his advanced studies nor during his work. When he was not drinking potions, he felt very mentally unwell, making his body very tense and vulnerable, which again interfered fulfilling their marital duties. With no other option, Severus finally spoke to Lucius about it, upon whom he required an oath of secrecy.

Severus did not know what Sirius had told his friends about their wedding night, but that day a concerned Lucius found him in the library and tried to find out if everything was all right. He agreed that yes, everything was fine. He wasn't going to say any more now either.

He never being the type to confide his problems, so without going into detail, he asked him for help with dealing with the trauma. It's hard to say what Lucius thought, whether he figured out what had happened, or whether he thought something even worse had happened, but being the gentleman that he was, he did not press Severus for confessions but promised discretion and sought him out a mind healer and so, he went to a mind healer with whom he discussed his marriage for hours. Of course, he did not say how it came about and on what grounds it was concluded, he could not take such a risk, the price would be too high if medical confidentiality was broken, instead he concentrated on their wedding night.

He did not even realise how much it shook him, how much he tried to deceive himself. Session after session, hour-long exercises in meditation in the pharmacy after work slowly allowed him to let go of his fears and understand his strength. He was not a victim, he was a strong man who could cope, could defend himself and win. This filled his heart with peace, at least in this respect, and allowed him to concentrate on his studies and work, which soon brought results.

Severus started to approach it unemotionally, methodically, it was simply an unpleasant necessity. Of course he still remembered their infamous wedding night, but now it didn't work on him like that anymore.

Fortunately, after that Sirius, a pathetic, stupid idiot, was sober, so it was easier to bear it mentally. Little blessings are always blessings after all.

Although at the beginning he was in a lot of pain each time, he was terribly tense and stressed and all he wanted was for Sirius to finish already, his body slowly got used to it and it didn't end in

tissue damage and bleeding. But it was still a very unpleasant experience. The fingers were already an incredibly difficult thing to accept, let alone the rest of the act.

They never kissed again, just as Severus had warned Sirius. For one thing, it would be too private, too intimate; for another, Severus felt even worse during a kiss than during intercourse. That foreign, moist muscle in his mouth, moving, touching him...Sirius' saliva in his mouth.... It made him gag. He felt no desire, only disgust. No, this was something he never wanted to experience again.

At any rate, Sirius tried to talk to him, and all Severus dreamed of was that he could go to his lab already.

"Tell me what you feel, at what point does it feel better."

Severus' lack of erection, his eyebrows drawn together in a grimace of pain, and his completely immobile, and stiff body were enough for an answer.

"Let me try to..."

Severus interrupted him mid-word.

"Stop it!" He opened his eyes slightly for a moment. "Just finish, will you?" His voice was slightly higher than usual, clearly trying to hide discomfort.

"Severus, because you want it that way, what we are doing is disgusting." Sirius paused for a moment and sat on his heels between Severus' parted thighs. The long-haired boy looked at him from under half-lidded eyelids. Finally, he closed his eyes and turned his face away.

"It would have been disgusting, one way or another." This was Sirius after all, the very fact of it was enough to make it disgusting and unbearable.

Frequently being in the same building with his bully was giving him migraines. What he didn't need in addition were these attempts by Sirius to talk to him and "make the sex better".

Sirius clenched his teeth, held him lightly by the hips and, accompanied by Severus' hiss of aversion, continued.

Severus saw no reason why they should turn this into something else, pretend that something united them beyond mutual hatred and necessity. It was better that way. One time, annoyed by Sirius' behaviour, he flipped on his belly and since then has always fulfilled his conjugal duty in this way.

Despite the clear objections expressed each time, this idiot tried to manoeuvre him anyway, or worse, inside him, Severus then began to clearly show his annoyance and shouted at him - why prolong it! Sometimes, when his shouting was not enough, he tried to defend himself by pushing him away with his hands, which surprisingly always worked, Sirius immediately stopped what he was doing and did what Severus wanted.

He always heard replies like "So that you'd have something out of it". So that he could have something out of it! What an absurdity, as if he cared, as if it mattered!

Severus did not understand for what reason Sirius assumed that what Severus wanted from their marriage had anything to do with his cock.

And after all, he had something out of it - he could keep his magic, and that was all. Sex didn't matter much to him, he would easily live out the rest of his life on the occasional wanking, life was so much more than that. It was simply another necessity that he dealt with with impatient quick movements of his hand, hurrying to get rid of distractions.

Sirius repeatedly proposed to him that they should swap roles in such a case, at most he would instruct him all the time but Severus refused. One, he wouldn't be able to get an erection even for a second under such conditions, two, it seemed much more personal to him, he would actively take part in it. In the current arrangement, all he had to do was grit his teeth and switch his mind off and somehow it would pass. The very thought of him having to carry out this pathetic act made him nauseous.

That conversation with Black, when he accepted the proposal, was the hardest thing of his life. He had to mentally prepare and collect his thoughts on it for days, rehearsing what he wanted to say, convincing himself that it was the right choice, before approaching him that May day as Gryffindor boy lay on the bench. That conversation had cost him several years of his life, he was sure of it!

At the very beginning of his marriage he felt such disgust for himself that he could not eat. Out of convenience, out of fear of losing his magic, he had fallen so low that he married someone who tried to kill him, someone who tormented him without reason for years, turning his life into hell. He sold himself, threw away his honour and dignity for a comfortable life. And he now lives in his house and lets him touch his body every month in ways that would never even occur to him. It filled him with such disgust that he wanted to vomit. The fact that his would-be murderer was going to have sex with him was also disgusting, but the very fact of marrying Sirius was the worst thing. It would have been quicker for him to come to terms with the carnal contact with him than with the knowledge that he himself, personally, had agreed to associate with him for at least 10 years, to live with him, to breathe the same air. Severus felt very humiliated by the situation, comforted only by the fact that Black was as happy about the developments as he was. In the end, the sexual act that took place sealed it, until that day there was still the possibility that something would happen that would make their marriage unnecessary, in addition he could still simply change his mind and run away, and then the marriage would be annulled. After the fact, Severus felt strangely relieved, he had lost the ability to choose, he no longer had to fight with himself. It felt like a ruptured boil, which hurts the most when it keeps swelling, but when it breaks, the body clears out the diseased contents and has a chance to recover. So it did.

Before the marriage for a while he considered living the life of a Muggle, but memories of a recent Easter trip to see his parents motivated him to accept the proposal.

Naturally, news of the Ministry's decree reached his mother and she told his father. She herself made no secret of her disappointment that his years of education at Hogwarts would be in vain and that he would end up living the life she did, but she did not defend Severus when his father promised to get him a job at the failing mill, and when Severus refused, he punched him in the face. Elieen looked away, as if to signal to Severus that she wanted no part of it, as she always had. Later, when his father left for work his mother admonished him not to tease his father, he wants the best for him. Throughout his school break he walked around with the bruises on his face slowly disappearing.

When Severus returned to Hogwarts he decided never to return to Spinner's End again. But yet he did.

When Severus turned up at the family home to invite his mother over, a huge brawl ensued, full of insults and threats, and ending, unsurprisingly for Severus in the slightest, with his father punching him in the face. Probably his father would have beaten him more if Severus had not decided that he had had enough and, despite the possible punishment for using witchcraft in the Muggle world, simply appeared out of the house in front of his father, being led away with a yell that he never wants to see him again.

Severus found this reasonable and intended to follow this advice, in fact he didn't know why he was even trying. He probably wanted his mother to know what had happened to him, after not returning to Spinner's End.

Before it came to that, when Severus presented the case he had come with, his father more than explicitly refused to take part in such a circus, not only would he be surrounded by the very freaks there, but he wasn't particularly proud of the fact that his son was marrying a man. A faggot! Just what was missing! He hoped that none of the neighbours would find out about it. The mother also did not look delighted when she heard that the spouse would be a man, but she did not say anything. At the sound of the name Black her eyes widened, and to Severus' great annoyance she began to ascertain whether he was the heir and first-born of these Blacks.

Anyway, it was decided that they would not attend either the wedding or the reception.

He was stupid and naive, what did he expect, he assessed wiping the blood from his nose in Slytheirn's common room before using a beauty spell to hide the traces of his visit to his parents. He was always so stupid, always hoping. For what? He didn't know himself, maybe for a bit of being treated like a human being? Anyway, no more of these naive dreams, he decided, and he stuck to it.

Life with Black was almost bearable. Almost, because every year they had to have a couple of exceptionally harrowing family gatherings at the Blacks' new mansion, which always ended up with a taunt towards Sirius and then resulted in a huge brawl. Severus hated these encounters and he was sure Sirius felt the same. Of course, the Snape family was still inferior; Severus was sure his father would not have hesitated to hit him even in front of Black'. To the latter's amusement, Severus supposed.

In Black' family it only ended with verbal attacks.

"Look at Regulus, Sirius! Your brother works at the Ministry!!!" Walpurga hissed in the direction of the firstborn. "He is widely respected, he married a pure blood girl." Here there was a discreet glance out of the corner of her eye towards Severus. "Aren't you going to congratulate him?" Because Regulus, like all the others, also had to marry when he graduated from Hogwarts.

Of course Severus also had to be at this wedding, even more lavish than his and Sirius', Severus suspected that the king's court would not have done a bigger ceremony and wasted more money. He spent the entire celebration hiding with Lucius and Narcissa in secluded corners. What Sirius was doing - that Severus did not know. It was not his problem.

When Regulus' wife became pregnant things got even worse.

"Look at Regulus, Sirius!" The aforementioned Regulus was slightly blushing, it's hard to say whether from pride or embarrassment. "Look, he and dear Claire are expecting a baby." And here Walpurga's gaze fell on Severus, followed by the gazes of everyone present, except Sirius.

Despite his very great self-control, Severus could not restrain the blush that blossomed on his cheeks at such a public reference to his and Sirius' bed relations. So he sat absolutely stiff and absolutely red, and absolutely blushing, because what do they expect from him?

Having the luxury that the speech was not directed to him, he could all the time look at the plate.

Just when he thought the situation couldn't get any more embarrassing Sirius proved him wrong.

"We are working intensively on this, dear mother!" which silenced his mother, who with an indignant "huh" busied herself talking to the other, now embarrassed guests.

When the worst of the embarrassment and shock had passed Severus felt a burst of laughter coming on, which he struggled to contain.

The same problem was clearly faced by Lucius and Narcissa, who were biting the corners of their mouths, trying not to show their amusement while all the respectable aunts and uncles, the older lady cousins and gentleman cousins, distant cousin of some aunt's nephew, twice removed, daddy and mummy, not to mention the most respectable Regulus and his saintly wife, they had all heard about Severus and Sirius trying for a baby. This information was totally unnecessary to them, and judging by their confused faces and avoidance of looking in Severus and Sirius' direction, they apparently did not consider the fact that they were sleeping together. Why they thought so, given the act, was beyond Severus' comprehension.

When they returned home, Severus wanted to ask Sirius what he was doing, not to admonish him, rather to understand why he was provoking his mother, but he dropped the idea. The less they

talked the better, it was easier to survive. He just wanted to wait out these ten years with as little conflict as possible.

Severus generally disliked spending time at Grimmauld Place outside his bedroom, treating it as a necessary evil.

Sirius often threw parties, and when he wasn't doing them, Lily, James and Peter visited him anyway, whether to drop in for dinner or just to sit and talk. Severus hated running into them, his feelings for his bullies had not changed, he wanted nothing to do with them. Lily, since she started dating James was also no longer the same person as before, it seemed that science no longer interested her so much.

Neither she nor James worked, living a comfortable life on the Potter family's money. Sirius wasn't working either, Peter had apparently taken a job in some office, as far as Severus could make out from the little snippets of conversation he heard.

Of course, now they didn't physically attack him or accost him, they even tried to talk to him when they came across him, greeted him as friends, asked about his work, but he never let himself be drawn into a conversation and quickly left.

He didn't need their company before, he didn't need it now.

The first time this happened, he was just leaving and heading towards the stairs when he came across Lily and James in the corridor.

Lily stopped. "Hello, Sev! Great to see you again! How are you?" She smiled in a friendly way, there was kindness and interest in her voice, and for a second it was like before, but only for a second. He looked her straight in the eye until she blushed and lowered her eyes.

"I'm fine, it's nice of you to ask." He then passed her and Potter and ran down the stairs. The gulf between them was too great, and pretending she hadn't broken off her friendship with him a few years ago wouldn't help bury it.

On subsequent occasions when he encountered them he culturally greeted them and left. Sirius, of course, tried to talk to him about it, but as Severus wanted to talk to them as much as to him, so it had no effect. Severus hoped that he had managed to end the subject once and for all at the previous conversation.

One afternoon, he was browsing through a catalogue of new scientific publications in the field of potions, and with a quill he marked the items he was interested in and intended to buy later, suddenly he heard a knock on his door. There was only one person who could come to him, and he guessed the purpose of the visit.

Just that day, he again ran into Sirius' friends who had stopped by for lunch, and again he said a quick goodbye, asking the House Elves to deliver his meal to his room.

"Come in," Severus called out, not interrupting his occupation. He sat with his legs crossed, in one of the armchairs Sirius had left for him. A large, richly carved mahogany armchair with brocade fabric, matching the decor with the equally rich and sumptuous rest of the furnishings.

He never changed anything in the decor, everything was exactly as it was on the first day, when he brought here some clothes and then drank a decoction which made him indifferent and mentally absent.

Sirius entered, carrying with him the cigarette smoke, the atmosphere of the city and the fun, even

though he had a serious expression on his face.

"Severus." Without waiting for an invitation Sirius sat down in the chair opposite him.

"Umm?" Severus rested the tip of the quill against his lips for a moment, and tapped it thoughtfully, not taking his eyes off the pamphlet.

"I think we should talk." Sirius reached over and grabbed his wrist, forcing him to look at himself. Black, almond eyes lingered on the hand on his wrist for a moment, then moved to Sirius' face and stared blankly at him.

"Is it that day of the month already?" He straightened his shoulders and sat with his usual stiff dignity, the robe adding to the seriousness of his appearance. Ever since he graduated from Hogwarts he had only ever worn such clothing, clearly setting himself apart from his husband in style, who looked very contemporary in his black leather tight trousers, light cream shirt and burgundy plush too-long jacket, or maybe it was a short coat? Severus didn't know. It didn't really matter.

Severus himself had not been so terrifyingly, even deathly thin for a long time, he had returned to his previous weight - and was simply very thin. He had no desire to starve himself and needed the strength for a high mental performance. On top of that, he moved a lot, and did not want to faint somewhere along the way. Sirius, as always, was epitome of vitality and fullness of life. Clearly more energy went into maintaining the muscles and not the brain. A happy rascal.

Not so happy at the moment, apparently, as he rolled his eyes. "Come on, you know very well it's not." He still didn't let go of Severus' hand, knowing that the only way he would do that was if Severus started demonstratively ignoring him.

"Then we have nothing to talk about." Severus already wanted to return to his interrupted activity, he was not going to get into an argument with Sirius. He didn't want to talk to him at all, about anything.

"Don't act like a child! We've been married for over a two years, you could start acting more normal." Sirius wasn't shouting yet, but he was definitely speaking in a raised voice.

"So only eight more years." Severus looked once more at his wrist, then at Sirius. "Let me go."

"Severus..." Grey eyes looked accusingly at him. "Stop it."

Severus had had enough of this. He jerked his hand away, and picked himself up. "You're the one who's going to stop, leave me alone!" He sprang to the centre of the living room, wanting to avoid another intrusive touch. "Accept that I'm not going to play the nice wifey to you and your friends!" Sirius also got up and ran towards him, but did not touch him. "No one tells you to play any wifey, all I ask is civilised behaviour!"

Severus put his arms around himself. "I behave civilly. I always say hello and goodbye, that should be enough. I am not going to suddenly pretend to be friends with you!"

This discussion led nowhere, and fortunately Sirius understood this, for with an irritated grumble he turned and walked away, leaving Severus to himself.

Severus had acquaintances of his own, because the word 'friend' was too much to describe his relationship with the Malfoys.

At first, Severus went to Lucius every weekend, but ever since Narcissa got pregnant and had mood swings, he gave up. He needed rest, not stress, and in such a situation this was impossible. Instead, he concentrated more on writing the book.

The extra time quickly brought results and before he knew it, the manuscript was ready.

With his heart beating fast with excitement, Severus put the parchment down on his desk. Unable to stand still, he began to circulate around his office and smile to himself. An owl had just arrived with a letter from the publishing house to which he had submitted his manuscript - Severus' first book had been accepted for publication! It was so stunning, so wonderful, he felt lightness in his whole body, he was overwhelmed by euphoria!

For several years, he had been writing this book with improved versions of potions and with his own, he had started while still in advanced courses. He spent long evenings doing experiments in his laboratory and meticulously wrote down his observations and notes, which he then, after finishing his work in the laboratory, edited and rewrote in his elegant, slightly slanted handwriting.

He finished it two months ago and, with some uncertainty, submitted it to the publisher. Now it turned out that the book was very successful and he was invited to meet the publisher. His publisher was a potion master, highly respected in academic circles, so this caused even more euphoria of being appreciated. Severus discussed his manuscript with the professor to whom he had been attending advanced courses for three years and it was he who recommended this very prestigious publishing house to him.

Finally Severus sat down in his armchair and, with a flick of his wand, summoned to himself a bottle of very light wine which he kept for special occasions - this was the first, but he hoped for more. He poured himself a glass with which to propose a toast and, with a smile fading on his lips, drank it, then closed his eyes and sat, savouring his first success on the path of adult life. For a while he thought about telling his parents, but decided there was no point, why open old wounds, what's gone is gone, it's over. He was alone in the world, and it was better that way. He knew full well what he would hear in the family home - his mother would start asking him about Black money and belittle his achievements and his father would call him a useless freak and a faggot. He didn't need that in his life. It was good as it was.

He was currently working on a textbook on spells, which was something almost revolutionary, as he had taken the view that all the best spells had been invented in the Middle Ages and nothing new could be invented nowadays. Well, Severus knew very well that this was not true, which he intended to prove with his book. He knew that he had years of work ahead of him, because, firstly, he wanted everything to be thoroughly tested and, secondly, he wanted to publish only his incantations. He knew that the book would not be very thick, but in any case it would be something very unusual on the publishing market.

It was to be a little alchemy manual, something that was currently lacking, something he knew about first-hand. This is also what it was to be called - "A Little Handbook to Alchemy".

Severus could not remember the last time he had come across a textbook that was not at least his age if not older. There was no reason to publish new versions, as nothing had been added there for years. He himself remembered using textbooks still belonging to his mother at Hogwarts, and he was sure they still used the same ones there. Who knows, maybe Dumbledore used the same ones. Well. He was very frustrated by outdated spells or recipes for potions, it was absurd that no one had improved it over the years!

At the beginning it was not easy for him, he had to combine his studies with his work, not only personally selling his potions but also preparing them on request, shopping for products needed for potions and sometimes personally collecting them in the forest or meadows to save on costs, in addition to the book he was working on and the experiments in the laboratory, his whole day was filled with activities down to the smallest minute.

He did not take a single knut from Sirius; he paid for everything out of his own pocket. He rarely took a meal break, usually eating in the middle of whatever he was doing.

Whole days blended into one. Now, since he had completed his advanced studies he had more

time.

With increased fervour he sat down to work, many hours sitting by candlelight, with his back bent low over the paper due to his myopia. He did not return to Grimmauld Place until late at night.

His good mood persisted for many days. Each day he exchanged correspondence with his future publisher, pleasantries mixed with practical remarks, and often thought ahead to the future, which for the moment seemed luminous. Apparently this was evident from him, for one day at breakfast, as Severus completely absent-mindedly hurriedly ate his meal, Sirius grunted to get his attention. Severus lifted his gaze from the other end of the large table covered with a white tablecloth. Black eyes scanned for a moment the bouquets of cream-coloured roses in vases, the numerous candelabras with candles and their flames reflected in the silver tableware, all of which, according to Severus, created a rather heavy evening atmosphere, even though it was morning. Then they concentrated on Sirius.

His husband was clearly troubled by something, judging by the look on his face. He stared at Severus, while sitting at the already empty plate, dressed as always in Muggle fashion, in tight jeans and a t-shirt with the print of some Muggle band. The Ramones, proclaimed the inscription. It said nothing to Severus. He currently wore his hair long, shoulder-length, which was still shorter than Severus'.

Although they had been married for three years, their relationship had not changed much, they still approached each other with a reluctant indifference.

Severus raised an eyebrow questioningly. Sirius still said nothing for a moment, but instead reached for his wine glass and sipped. Severus felt like rolling his eyes, not only that he had been drinking since the morning, but now he decided to make a show of it.

Finally, Sirius had apparently made up his mind.

"Do you have someone?"

Severus didn't know what to expect but certainly not this. The question was so startling that he wasn't sure he had understood correctly.

"Pardon? What do you mean?" He looked at him intrigued. He had also finished his breakfast, so the house elves gathered up the dishes and disappeared.

Black looked at him with a demonstrably bored expression and rolled his eyes at Severus' question.

"Are you dating someone?" He said it slowly, in a tone as if he was talking to someone with mental problems.

Severus was silent for a moment, for a fleeting moment hoping it was some clumsy form of dry-humour, but Sirius did not look like he was joking. If this had been a few years ago he would have suspected it was an attempt at mockery, and that where the other Marauders were hiding. He raised his hand and rubbed his eyelids with his thumb, then his temples. The absurdity of this question almost left him speechless.

"Why?" He should have left it at that and just ended the conversation, but he didn't, his personality type made him damn curious as to what was going through Black's head. It was crazy even for him, and that was already indicative of something, given the nonsense he usually talked.

His husband looked at him intently, as if seeing him for the first time, running his eyes over his face. Eyebrows, eyes, nose, he covered everything with his gaze slowly, far too slowly, until finally his gaze stopped on Severus' mouth where it remained for what seemed like an eternity. This got on Severus' nerves and made him uneasy, he hated being stared at. He hoped he wasn't blushing.

"You've changed, you're behaving differently." Black was silent for a moment, apparently searching for the right words.

"What do you mean? How am I behaving?" Severus tilted his head, still intrigued by Black's way of thinking. Could it be that he was already drunk and hence the bizarre conversation?

"Umm, I don't know. You seem more content." Sirius wandered his eyes across the table, where he began tapping his fingers. "You look different, too, actually."

Severus automatically looked after himself, at his robe, the same as always. He hadn't changed anything about his appearance in years, the only difference was his longer hair, but it would be quite unlikely that Black had only now noticed it. His face had also grown into his nose, he was now simply a man with a pronounced hooked nose and not, as he judged himself, a freak.

Sirius watched Severus' inspection.

"You look healthier."

Ah! Severus hadn't thought about it before, but it was possible that he actually had. Severus' body was nothing like it had been when he was a teenager. The clumsy, skinny teenager had transformed into a harmoniously built young man, still very skinny and petite but also shapely, with tiny, tight muscles from being constantly on the move. His body became more springy, but Sirius could not know that. Apart from the first time this deplorable act took place, when Severus was naked, every other time he wore a nightdress, which Sirius simply rolled up as much as necessary.

For more than a year Severus did not allow any touching except the most unavoidable, he had even managed to invent a spell for local muscle relaxation, so there was no need to prepare him for the act with fingers, so at least some of the unpleasant experience was gone, and since he decided they might as well do it while he was lying on his stomach, he didn't have to be face-to-face with Sirius. In the course of time his body got used to this experience, so the pain definitely decreased in intensity.

These monthly meetings of theirs in Sirius' bedroom were a great inconvenience, but Severus could endure the few minutes that were necessary for this, it was not too high a price to pay for the possibility of continuing a normal life.

He returned his thoughts to the here and now. It was possible that his complexion looked more healthy, that this was what Sirius had in mind. Whatever it was about, Severus had already lost interest in the conversation.

"And you have a problem with that, yes?"

Severus finished with pleasantries, hoping Black would catch the hint and end the subject. He didn't have all day to do this, he had to open the shop, take care of work. Black could spend all day lazing or whatever he was doing, it did not particularly interest Severus.

He knew, of course, that he'd missed the parties after Lily's baby was born a month ago. Potter now spent all his days with his family and Black had to fend for himself, as even his last choice for entertainment, Peter, was usually busy with his work. Gosh, Severus felt SO sorry for him!

Sirius looked on with a puzzled expression, as if he did not understand for what reason Severus was not following his train of thought. Well, I'm sorry for thinking rationally and not like a fucked up alcoholic, Sirius, thought Severus in exasperation.

"No, of course not. It is simply that your affair may lead to the annulment of our marriage. Can't you wait on that? I know it's hard, especially now that you've already got someone, but a hell of a lot depends on it, our whole future."

Severus stared in wonder, eyes bulging, he felt as if he had lost his ability to think. Well, yes, it's bloody logical, isn't it? The good mood, the healthier appearance absolutely suggested an affair. Only someone like Sirius could come to such a conclusion! He thought of nothing else but foolishness.

Oh yes, Sirius had no idea what he was up to all day, it probably never even crossed his mind that Snivellus was still sitting with his long nose in textbooks, or even worse, writing his own. What a bore this Snivellus is, isn't he Sirius? He doesn't do anything exciting, no parties, no drama, he doesn't even cheat on you.... Hopeless situation!

He closed his eyes. Only seven more years, Severus consoled himself in his mind, only a little

more than twice what has already passed and he will be able to divorce. He'll find a nice flat, move out, forget about him, be free. It's not that long. He can take it.

Already Severus was slowly preparing to move, arranging a flat for himself above the apothecary. Yes, he had plenty of time to do so, but the promise of freedom made him feel better. He slowly planned the layout of the flat, thought about the choice of furniture. He intended to move out the day they got their divorce.

All the time he was aware of Sirius' expectant gaze focused on him. For a moment he felt like despairing, lamenting and wailing, complaining about the cruelty of Sirius' demands and bemoaning his great love that would go to perdition, but he did not do so for fear that Sirius would believe it and not be persuaded that it was mocking him.

Instead, he averted his eyes and looked at Sirius with weariness, trying to convey to him with his gaze how unimpressed he was with his intelligence.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to destroy our future." He finally managed to coax out.

He stood up from the table and left the room with a sweeping, quick step, his robe rippling to the rhythm of his movements, leaving Sirius and his fantasies to themselves.

The warm October wind blew Severus' hair away as he walked towards the agreed meeting place with his publisher. Indian Summer, his favourite time of year, had begun. As he walked, he ignored the passers-by, instead gazing at the trees he passed, these small expressions of beauty, the amber air, the red rowans and the browned leaves always bringing his thoughts from science down to earth.

A tall man in an old-fashioned suit from the middle of the previous century, looking to be in his forties, but prematurely greying, was just approaching the door of the restaurant. Severus recognised him from the photographs on his scientific publications, and he evidently recognised him too, for he waited at the door and smiled as he approached him and jovially patted him on the back.

"You are Severus! I would recognise you anywhere."

Severus reciprocated the smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Seamus. It is an honour to meet you!" His heart was beating like crazy with excitement, but he tried not to show it.

Inside, they were seated at a pre-booked table.

Severus, not being the type of person who goes to exclusive restaurants, felt a little uncomfortable in the elegant, expensive place. He tried not to look around too much so as not to make a poor impression and to keep a serious face, as he struggled to hide his growing excitement. It was finally happening for real, finally moving forward. Today he was to sign the contract, they could discuss the details on the occasion live, and early next year publication would begin.

He felt the excitement as great as on his first day at Hogwarts, when everything was still so fresh, vibrating with dreams and hope and offering the chance of a new life. And then reality came along and he already knew that nothing in his life had changed for the better. Well, he hoped that with the book it would go better.

Over lunch and coffee, they chatted freely, as if they had known each other for years, finding a common language in no time.

The manuscript lay on a table in front of the publisher, who touched it every now and then and stroked the leather-bound cover of the notebook.

"I must say, Severus, that I am absolutely delighted with your work." Mr. Seamus still was flipping through the pages. "You have done an amazing job. The level of detail and expertise is truly impressive."

Severus nodded, a faint smile appearing on his lips. "Thank you. I've been working on this book for a long time, and I'm glad it's finally come to fruition." He didn't know how to react to the praise, he had practically never heard it so he blushed.

"I'm looking forward to the reaction from the wizarding community." The publisher smiled and spoke in an excited voice. "Oh, Severus, we are all very impressed with your manuscript. It is not often that we see such a comprehensive guide to advanced spells and potions from someone so young."

The older man's face lit up with undisguised delight. "You're a prodigy, but you know that, don't you?"

Severus smiled as stiffly again, somewhat embarrassed by the plethora of praise heaped on him. "I have been studying magic since I can remember. It is my passion."

At Hogwarts it was taken for granted that he was so good, it was expected of him and there was no reason to praise him for it. If, on the other hand, he had done less well, then surely that would have been noticed and he would have been reprimanded.

"Well, it certainly shows in your writing," Mr. Seamus nodded, reopening the leather-bound notebook and running his eyes over it, as if he still couldn't believe that the contents of this book really existed.

When they had finished their meal, the publisher took out a quill and a scrap of parchment. "Let's make it official, shall we?" He scribbled out a contract for Severus to sign.

Severus couldn't believe it. This was really happening - he was about to become a published author! His head was spinning with joy.

Once all the formalities have been completed they could have focused on less important things. The publisher seemed almost as happy as Severus, all the while wearing a broad smile on his lips. "Now let's talk about the final details. We're thinking of a hardcover edition, with full-colour illustrations inside. We also need to discuss a promotional tour and media appearances." Neither of these pleased Severus too much, but he knew he would have to reckon with it, so he simply went along with what Mr. Seamus said.

Then they discussed and chose the type of paper on which the book will be published - vellum, which will also be bound. Severus, having a weakness for medieval books, immediately approved the idea. Mr. Seamus, evidently sharing his taste, agreed to the font Severus proposed - Aldine, extremely popular in the Middle Ages, together with vellum forming a very harmonious composition. The book will be decorated with Severus' drawings of plants and other potions he wrote about.

The only thing Severus regretted was that it could not be published in Latin. However, the audience would have been too small and the textbook could not have been used at Hogwarts. Well, maybe one day. Now his dream had come true anyway. His academic career was gathering momentum.

They spent time in a pleasant atmosphere until dinner, at which they moved to another restaurant, where they celebrated the signing of the contract with a bottle of wine.

Severus, not being accustomed to alcohol, was sure he had certainly blushed, on top of which he often laughed, which deepened the blush. But he did not care, he felt light and at ease. It's been too pleasant an evening to be bothered with such things.

Before Severus realised it was the middle of the night, they were enjoying each other's company so much that they did not notice the passing of time. Both of them could talk about potions for hours, which they did, exchanging comments and observations, fascinated by the intellect of the interlocutor.

Severus did not know why he immediately trusted him, but he did. Perhaps it was because, with his gray hair and aura of firmness but also great kindness, he didn't resemble any of his bullies, listened to him genuinely and talked to him as an equal?

It was only then that he realised how much he lacked friends, someone to talk to about things that interested him, someone to turn to when he felt lonely. Severus regretted that his acquaintance with Lucius had never turned into a friendship. There was always something missing, some small factor that would make them pass the barrier of acquaintance and enter into a friendship. It was the same

with Narcissa. They seemed to get along in everything, but still something was missing. The fault lay not with them but with him. Something in him resisted opening up to them. He couldn't break through, he never felt equal to them, he didn't know why, maybe because they had witnessed his low moments when he was the victim of bullying? It wasn't even a matter of social difference, although this also added its own, they couldn't be further from each other. He simply did not want to be "that poor Severus" in the eyes of his friends. Poor in every sense of the word.

Of course, he talked to people every day, even more often than he would have liked, the shop customers sometimes treating him as an outlet for their problems. He also often talked to his professors and appreciated this very much, but he had no one with whom he could simply discuss the day's events, complain or rejoice, talk about books and his plans or go shopping. Nevertheless, he did not complain, he still got more from life than he could have imagined, and loneliness was expected in his case.

Only frequent encounters with the Potters, Pettigrews and of course Black made him feel worse, he felt surrounded by his bullies. He never managed to get out of the situation, he was stuck in it all the time. In that someone else's house, with the enemy he had for a husband.

When he finally returned to Grimmauld Place it was four o'clock in the morning. It was not unusual for Sirius to come home at this hour, but it was for Severus, as until now he has always slept at this time and woken up two hours later. Weary but happy, he quietly made his way to his room, undressed and fell heavily onto the bed, where he immediately fell asleep.

The next day Severus skipped breakfast, slept until midday, and did not open the shop as usual. One day a year it could stay closed, he decided when he finally woke up and ate the breakfast brought by the house elves in his bedroom. All the while, he felt excited, bursting with the urge to act.

Lost in thought, immersed in the planning of his book, he took a shower, changed his clothes and went straight to his working studio, belonging to the part of the rooms assigned to him, where he stayed until the evening.

He didn't see Sirius that day but he didn't give it a single thought. But apparently Sirius did, because when Severus showed up for breakfast the next day Sirius sat there with a look on his face as if he had eaten a lemon. This time he was sitting stretched out on a chair in a too-short t-shirt with "Joy Division" written on it, revealing a sliver of his belly. This also said nothing to Severus. Sirius clearly had a weakness for such type of clothing.

Severus, as always, sat down in his seat and, paying no attention to his surroundings, began to eat his breakfast and drink his coffee. He planned to open the shop at a normal time that day, so his thoughts ran to the duties ahead.

"Severus."

Sirius' voice snapped him out of his reverie as he was just calculating the amount of dittany he needed today and wondering if he had it in stock or if he would need to shop for it. He decided that it was better to buy more than to run out.

He unhurriedly drank the rest of the coffee from his mug.

He was not particularly interested in what Sirius had to say. More of this nonsense he talked before? "Yeah?"

Severus supposed some pointless conversation awaited him again, Sirius obviously was bored. Although they lived together, he learned to live beside Sirius rather than with him and sometimes even forgot his presence for a day or two, or at least that was the case until recently.

"I need to revisit this matter of your affair." Well, obviously, Severus was not disappointed. Yes, Black absolutely had to revisit that topic, there was no discussion here. After all, it's so crucial. Severus discreetly rolled his eyes. Damn you, Black.

"If you are not going to end it, then be more discreet. Anyone can see you."

Severus looked bewildered. "What are you talking about?"

This was something new.

"I saw you last time, you entered the restaurant. If I've seen you then others might too." He fell silent for a moment. "So you prefer guys? That's good. Congratulations, by the way. He's a bit older, I think, but you seemed happy."

Severus looked at him, gathering his thoughts. Well, yes, Sirius had by some miracle seen him with his publisher and, being himself, assessed the situation as he did. Good thing he didn't decide to say hello and discredit Severus with some stupid comment.

Trying not to lose control of himself, he focused his gaze on the roses in the bouquet. They were blood red, fresh, not a trace of their slow dying yet visible on them.

He finally mastered his anger. Choosing his words carefully, he turned to the man sitting opposite him in a seemingly carefree position. "Concerning my ...affair." He looked Sirius in the eye.

"When you saw me with this man, was I doing anything inappropriate?"

"No, you were walking into a restaurant, and then talking at a table." Sirius pondered. "Ah, he touched you in public."

Severus propped his elbows on the table and then his face on his hands. He'll have to handle this gently, as if he were talking to a child, he assessed. He wasn't going to explain himself to him, but he also didn't want this constant questioning and Sirius' stupid conclusions. He was not going to serve him as entertainment. If Sirius really cared, and wasn't bothering him out of boredom, he'd be able to find out about Severus' current plans and occupations.

"He touched me?" He repeated after him.

Sirius nodded. "Yes, to your back."

Slowly, Severus, slowly. You can always hex him into the next week if he pisses you off too much, he consoled himself in thought.

"Was that....an inappropriate touch?" It was starting to get ridiculous, this slow guidance of Sirius and his complete lack of awareness of what Severus was doing.

"No, not really," Sirius shook his head. He lifted his glass of wine and drank it in one gulp, then poured himself more.

"So what's your problem?" Severus furrowed his brow, he didn't like the speed with which Sirius drank, he didn't like being around drunk people. Sirius had already shown what he could be then, what he was capable of. Luckily, he was going to work soon, then Sirius could get drunk even to the point of unconsciousness, if he so wished.

Sirius was obviously completely unaware of Severus' growing discomfort. And very well, if he had known about it he would surely have been walking drunk from morning to evening if he could have met Severus.

"As I said, the others could see you too. Kreacher said you came back at four in the morning, drunk, looking and behaving strangely." He straightened up more in his chair, crooked his head and looked at Severus with seriousness. Perhaps even resentment? Severus wasn't sure.

"He said so?" Well, yes, Kreacher was obviously denouncing him. He didn't hold it against him, the Elf was doing what he thought was necessary.

"Yes." A short, succinct answer.

Severus met his gaze again for a moment. Yes, Sirius definitely seems to be angry with him. That is his problem.

He shrugged his shoulders. "And did Kreacher say anything about the fact that sometimes your motorcycle sounds like a symphony of farts at 3am?" From time to time, these noises would rouse Severus from his sleep, but he, being a civilised man who wanted to wait out these decades with as little conflict as possible, said nothing about it. Black clearly had a different approach to the subject, and if he could provoke conflict, he did so.

Sirius turned red in the face and crossed his arms. "Don't change the subject! Now we're talking about you coming home in the morning!"

Of course they do. Sirius has all the freedom of this world, he can do what he wants and when he wants, we control and check only Severus, logical. At least for Sirius it is so.

Severus sighed, gathering his strength for further conversation. "I see. Let's assume that was the case. Are you worried that someone saw me?"

"Yes, exactly." Sirius assessed his appearance again, probably wondering how someone as ugly as Snivellus managed to find a lover. Whether Sirius had one - that was of extreme disinterest to Severus, as long as he was discreet. Even if he slept with the whole city, that was his business.

"All right, I'll take that into consideration, and I won't be back at four in the morning, drunk, looking and behaving strangely."

Instead of catching the mockers, Sirius seriously nodded his head. For a while they sat in silence.

Sirius spoke up again as Severus began to rise.

"Did you sleep with him?" Although he was clearly trying to be indifferent, there was a clear tone of poorly concealed rage in his voice. Severus nearly burst into laughter; Sirius definitely does not know how to mask his feelings as well as he does. And what happened to 'congratulations, you look happy' he felt like asking, but relented.

"How is that any of your business?" He sat down again.

"I'm just curious. I know how you approach sex." Sirius looked ironically at Severus. "This no, that no, here don't touch, here don't look." He said trying to parody Severus' voice. His face expressed disgust and mockery.

"Hmmm." Severus nodded. If Sirius expected to get Severus talking by this means, he was sorely mistaken.

"So, are you sleeping with him?"

Severus just stared. Receiving no reply, Sirius continued, in an increasingly attacking tone, and Severus discreetly reached for his wand.

"Does this guy mind what we do in bed with each other?"

The atmosphere between them was thickening, becoming more and more tense. Severus being Severus did not step down but took up the tone of the conversation, he tried to speak and look with an indifference lined with contempt. "Him no, me yes, but that's life, there's nothing I can do about it, right?"

Sirius snarled in exasperation, got up and moved towards the door, from far too close a distance, for Severus' comfort, passing the chair on which Severus was sitting, leaned over to hiss right in his face "fuck you, bitch!" and walked out.

Severus did not even flinch, not the slightest grimace betraying that he had noticed this behaviour. He sat waiting, until finally his husband footsteps fell silent in the corridor.

Well well, he thought, maybe it would teach Sirius not to talk crap.

Tension was slowly passing, so Severus propped his head on his hands for a moment. He was sick of it, sick of stupid conversations with Sirius, sick of pretending, sick of living together with him, he was sick of having to spend those few minutes on something so disgusting and primitive as their spousal duties. They had a schedule for it, a scheduled day and time. To make it easier they did it on the same day of the month as their first night. Severus hated it, he did not understand how someone could do this of their own free will.

This aggressive, abusive mood of Sirius was stressing him out, in two days "that" day would fall and Severus hoped that his husband would not translate his feelings into this act, he did not feel like fighting with him in bed again.

Sirius had always been difficult and a bored Sirius is even worse than a typical Sirius. He couldn't believe that he was already looking forward to when the Potter child would grow up enough for James to start partying again and Sirius to finally get away from him.

He sat, breathing deeply, feeling the stress leave him and instead began to feel a growing attack of hysterical laughter. Sirius thinks he has a lover. Him! Of all people, he is supposed to be the one who is so passionate that he cannot hold back even in public. He laughed so hard that his tears flowed, then for several minutes he sat breathing deeply, trying to calm down. This hysterical laughing and crying for a moment threatened to turn into sobbing. He thought of a calming potion, he had it in his room, maybe he should go back for it? No, he did not want to become addicted. Instead, just as the therapist had taught him, he breathed deeply, counting down in his mind until his breathing slowly calmed down.

Finally Severus stood up, walked over to where previously Sirius was sitting, picked up the glass with a little wine in the bottom and threw it across the room, watching it smash into thousands of pieces against the wall. He did the same with the half-full bottle, panting as he watched the red stain grow on the wall and floor. Only then did he turn around and leave. He knew that Sirius wouldn't see it anyway, every little glass shard and wine stain would be cleaned up by the house elves, and the glass and bottle replaced. Not even the slightest trace of Severus' outburst will remain.

1981.01.09

The book was a success, it even attracted academic interest and he was even interviewed for academic journals. It was published just a week before Severus' birthday, and he considered it the best present he could have dreamed of. Of course, he got his own copy, bound in high-quality velin, with the title and his name embossed on the leather and painted in old gold paint.

Mr. Seamus had heard from somewhere that it was his birthday and took the opportunity to give him a volume of the book as a gift, at a restaurant dinner to which he had invited him. The book was wrapped in an elegant cream-coloured handmade paper glove, tied with a dark red ribbon.

Severus fought the tears coming to his eyes for a moment before finally winning.

He lifted his gaze to his companion. "Thank you, it is a wonderful gift!"

Mr. Seamus smiled in a friendly manner. "I am very glad you like it, dear Severus, I was in a hurry to get this edition out in time!"

Severus reciprocated the smile. "Oh, I like it so much, it's the best present I could have dreamed of!" And he wasn't lying.

With his heart beating hard, Severus looked at the gift, his long white fingers leafing through the book. He felt a burst of pride and at the same time a wave of regret that he had no one to show and tell about it.

Of course, he could tell Lucius and Narcissa about it and he would, but he regretted not having a family to which he could rejoice in his success. It would be nice to have someone who have been proud of him, would have read it and put it in a prominent place in the house. This time, however, he wasn't stupid and naïve and didn't go to show off his book at Spinner's End.

He bit his lip for a moment, trying to shake off the sadness. In the end, there was no reason for it. He had just turned 21, published his first book and was sitting in an elegant restaurant with a fine dinner and a glass of champagne in his honour. Life had gone much better than he, a sewer rat, had expected. His parents probably wouldn't have believed in his success anyway. Well, their loss, Severus was not going to prove anything to them.

With a broad smile, he thanked for the book once again and began to talk. After only a short while, Severus became engrossed in it and became so excited that his mouth wouldn't close, he kept talking about the book, which he thought about with a slight embarrassment when he returned to Grimmauld Place later that evening.

Since that conversation with Sirius he had watched the hours, in order to be in time for the curfew so unexpectedly imposed on him and though it made him feel like a child, he tried never to return after midnight again.

That evening the wind blew and snow fell heavily, together forming swirling frosty spirals, the moon was almost invisible from beyond the snowstorm. The world seemed deserted, everyone hid in their homes.

Mr. Seamus drove Severus in his carriage up to Grimmauld Place itself. The building stood dark, with the lights out, when they arrived at their destination.

"Good night Severus! I'm sure you've been looking forward to dinner with your husband, and a gift from him, and I've been inconsiderate in keeping you talking so long in the restaurant. I am sorry, I have already forgotten what it is to be young and in love!"

Severus smiled with difficulty. "Oh, it's all right, I had a wonderful time! My husband is already asleep at this hour, I got my present in the morning!"

Then he said his goodbyes, thanked him again, and with his gift in hand, jumped out lightly, strode swiftly to the entrance door, his black hair and clothes instantly dusted white.

A birthday gift from Sirius, being in love....Severus shook his head, what sweet nonsense, but it is good that no one knew the truth. That would have been dangerous, it was a good thing they managed to keep up appearances.

Stooping and shaking his cloak out of the snow, he entered the building. With a gesture of his wand, he lit several candles along the path leading to his room, hung up his cloak. No house Elf appeared, but Severus did not give it two thoughts.

Upon entering from the hall, he almost immediately came upon Sirius sitting in an armchair in the dark, with a glass of wine in his hand and a bottle on the table beside him.

"Indeed you are discreet, your lover drives you to your house in the middle of the night." The tone of his voice was mocking, aggressive and accusatory, plus it was clear he had been drinking alcohol for some time. Severus felt anxious but did not show it.

"It's not the middle of the night, it's barely past midnight." He was not going to get into a discussion with a drunk Sirius. Without stopping he moved straight towards the stairs.

"What's in your hand? He's buying you presents?" Sirius stood up surprisingly efficiently for someone drunk and with a quick step ran towards Severus, who stopped mid-step, not wanting to give the impression that he was running away from him. He imagined the scene, him running down the stairs, Sirius running after him. Uhhh, horror, a very humiliating vision.

"Yes, it's a gift. What do you want?" He stood with his chin raised high, watching Sirius walk up the stairs, closer and closer, until finally he was standing on the same step as him. He deliberately stood a little too close, with his athletic physique and being almost a head taller than Severus, he gave a very overwhelming impression.

"How sweet, how romantic!" Sirius sneered, and Severus could feel the rage overwhelming him.

"What did he give you, a necklace? Are you his girlfriend, Snivellus?" He reached to grab the box, but Severus was quicker and pushed his hand away. "Does he know that he is sleeping with a married man? Doesn't it bother him? Or have you already told him about our arrangement, hmm? Answer, Snivellus, did you quickly tell him everything?"

Sirius was deliberately fueling his anger, Severus was sure of it. Finally, he looked at him with rage and reached out again, this time more effectively because he managed to grab it.

"What are you doing, let it go!" Severus tried to yank the box out of his hand, but Sirius' grip was too strong. Severus was furious with how the situation had developed.

What an absurd scene, he thought, they jostled each other like children over a toy. If Sirius wanted to behave like that, that's his business, but why drag him into it!

"I'm just curious, ok? Aren't you going to show your husband what you get from your lover, Snivellus?" He almost growled right in his face, then jerked his arm hard. Severus did not let go, instead holding the book with both hands. They struggled for a while, until finally Sirius used more strength and managed to pry the gift out of Severus' hands, while pushing him so that he lost his balance.

For a brief moment, it seemed as if time stood still as Severus flew with his back down the high staircase, when suddenly Sirius leapt forward, jumping a few steps and grabbed him by the forearm, cutting his fall.

They stood, panting with rage and stress, shock at the would-be catastrophe they had avoided by a hair's breadth, Sirius still holding Severus' arm, looking at each other with wide-open eyes. Finally Severus jerked his arm out of his grasp, then his book out of his other hand, and quickly

passed him, running up the stairs. At the top of the stairs he paused for a moment.

"I didn't say anything to him, do you take me for an idiot? And I'm nobody's girlfriend, Black!"

And he ran to his rooms, leaving Sirius behind him, who was still standing in the same place.

To soothe his nerves, Severus took a long, hot bath, washing away the day's experiences, both good and bad.

He did not know what had possessed Black, he had already been behaving in a civilised manner for several years, no quarrels, whether drunk or sober, they occasionally exchanged a few words about domestic matters, generally avoided each other and did not get in each other's way.

Severus did not understand why this sudden outburst and return to the old behaviour in Black. After all, he couldn't really think Severus had a lover, it was ridiculous! And even if he did think that, it wasn't about jealousy, rather Black was terrified that Severus' reckless behaviour would cause them both to lose their magic. This Severus could understand, it was even rational in its own twisted way.

Reassured, he stretched out in the warm water.

After so many sacrifices to suddenly lose everything.... Yes, it could have caused an attack of rage in someone like Black. But Severus had done nothing wrong so he felt no guilt.

With his eyes closed, he lay, inhaling the herbal scent from the homemade bath mixture. Sirius and everything associated with him slowly drifted away from his memory, replaced by bliss. When he finally emerged from the bath, he was in a good mood again. A glass of water with a few drops of calming potions also did the trick.

He stood barefoot on the heated surface of the white-black tiles on the floor, walked across the soft carpet of his living room to his bedroom, where he changed into his nightdress, lay down on his bed. His rooms were warm, dry and pleasant, a fire was burning in the fireplace, probably set by Kreacher as soon as Severus returned home, the atmosphere was very cosy, calming.

This was the one advantage of living in this house, that for the first time in his life he was not constantly so cold. In his family home the cold always seeped through his muscles into his bones, no amount of clothing could keep him warm, there was never enough money for sufficient coal. Conditions at Hogwarts were incomparably better, even luxurious, but the Slytherin dorm room was in the dungeons, and it was cold there. With his thinness he felt the low temperature much more intensely than the others, and apparently Kreacher had managed to notice. Severus was grateful for this gesture of kindness.

With fast, efficient hands he picked up the box, untied the ribbon again and looked at the book with a slight smile. In bewilderment he ran his finger over the convex letters. His name and surname. He was curious to see if the book would make it to Hogwarts, and if so, whether Dumbledore and Slughorn would recognise his name.

That night he slept a deep sleep in which he relived the fact that his book had been published. He was happy.

At breakfast it started again. Sirius had already sobered up but was just as annoying as yesterday. He sat stretched out in his chair as always, this time dressed in leather black trousers and a white t-shirt with The Doors written on it and a picture of some guy's face, and was clearly waiting for Severus. Obviously, he had a glass of wine in his hand, and a bottle stood in front of him. Severus wrinkled his nose slightly at this sight but said nothing. As soon as he had time to sit down and reach for his coffee, Sirius started talking.

"So it was your birthday...You could have told me. Happy birthday." Severus nodded noncommittally and sipped from the cup. "And what you had in your hand was your book?"

"Yes." Severus didn't particularly feel like eating, and it was Sirius's chatter that was making him

lose the remnants of his appetite.

Sirius looked at him as he used to back in his Hogwarts days, when he was about to attack him. Clearly their relationship would go back to the beginning, Severus assessed. Since the wedding, that scuffle over the book yesterday had been his first display of brutality; up until then, even when he was angry he'd managed to shout it out and hadn't moved on to physical attacks, leaving him as much private space as Severus wanted.

"Why didn't you say anything?" Sirius drank the wine to the end, reached for the bottle and poured himself more.

"About what? About the birthday or the book? In either case, it's none of your business." Severus shrugged his shoulders. He set the cup down. He didn't feel like staying here even a moment longer.

"Are you always going to be such an annoying bitch, Snivellus?"

Severus glanced at Sirius, who didn't look like he was going to simply end the conversation. Well, of course, he has to fight first. He rolled his eyes and stood up from the table.

"Are you sleeping with your publisher?" Sirius stood up as well, walked a few steps but was still not very close. In one gulp he drank another glass of wine to the end. Severus had no idea which one it was today. Second? The third? More?

"None of your business."

Sirius set his glass down in a random spot on the table, reached over to the flowers standing in the vase, and stroked the petals of one of the roses lightly, then took it out of the bouquet and held it in his hand.

Severus looked on indifferently.

"Lily told me about your birthday and about this book.... She saw it in the shop, apparently it has good reviews. Bravo Snivellus, you must have made quite an ...effort in order to achieve this."

Sirius threw the rose he held in his hand at him, Severus dodged and took a step away.

"Leave me alone, Black. Don't make me regret it even more."

Sirius began to laugh with that cranky madman's laugh of his. Severus hated the sound of it. The tall, athletic guy who reminded Severus every now and then that he was his husband lowered his head and focused the gaze of his glassy, reddened grey eyes on him. "You regretted it? You? What can you regret? "

Severus tilted his head, demonstratively thinking, and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Actually, you're right, there aren't many things I regret. I'm going surprisingly well. You're the only thing I regret, but that won't last forever. Just 2,335 more days and I'll be rid of you from my life forever."

An enraged Sirius leaned towards him. Severus knew he was provoking him, but it was stronger than him; he was not the withdrawing type.

Besides, why should he not provoke him? After all, that's what Sirius wants, he wanted an argument, why not give it to him?

"Are you counting down the days? You? You've turned my life into hell, and yet you dare to say YOU regret it!" The muscles of his neck tightened as he shouted, if sight could kill Severus would already be dead, of that he was certain.

Severus had made Sirius' life a living hell? Very interesting, he wondered in what way he saw it that way. As far as he was aware he did nothing with Sirius' life, other than exist, of course. He shook his head and watched him with amusement.

"Oh, I think the compliment is exaggerated, but thank you! It's the best gift I could have received from you." He turned to leave, but paused as if he remembered something else. "Well, second best

exactly. Divorce comes first."

Sirius threw himself at him so quickly that Severus did not have time to react when he landed on his back on the floor crushed by his weight. For a moment he tried to break free but to no avail, Sirius quickly grabbed his wrists and lifted them up where he pressed them to the floor and immobilised him.

Severus felt his blood pressure rise, heard a humming in his ears. Black lay on top of him with all his weight, pressing him to the floor, immobilising his chest, and all Severus could do was pant with his mouth gaping open, trying to draw in more oxygen and writhing, to no avail, his chest was compressed and did not move, in his body's growing panic. Did Sirius go completely insane and decide to kill him in a drunken rage for mentioning the divorce? In an alcoholic fit of rage, Black apparently intended to finish what he had started fifth years earlier. Severus couldn't concentrate, the pain in his chest filled his every thought, made him whole in pain.

He felt tears uncontrollably running down his cheeks as he gasped for air. His lungs burned more and more, black spots flew in front of his eyes, he felt like he was drifting away. He had a vague feeling that Sirius was looking at him, but he was no longer sure of anything, he did not even know how long they had been lying like that, whether a few seconds or a few hours. All he knew was that if Sirius didn't get off him he would soon suffocate. A damnable, deplorable and humiliating death.

Suddenly Sirius put both of his wrists in one hand, supported himself slightly with the other hand, lifting his body weight off Severus, so that he could finally take a breath, which he did, almost instantly coughing.

Busy coughing, still unable to get enough oxygen, with tears still streaming down his cheeks, he did not even notice when Black let him go and stood up. It was only when someone lifted his head and brought a glass of water to his mouth, forcing him to drink for a while, interrupted by coughing, that he realised he was not longer in distress. Finally his breathing calmed down, although he still felt weak and his head began to ache. He propped himself up on his elbows on the floor, gathering his strength, his long hair covering him like a curtain, cutting him off from the world. At one point he heard footsteps moving away. Black left, he was left alone.

That day he opened the shop an hour later than usual, after drinking a sedative potion.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Leave me alone." Severus swept Sirius wide and left the living room. Sirius followed him, but did not get too close, silently watching as he put his cloak on, a hood over his head and went outside, heading for work.

Moments earlier they had another regrettable interaction.

First thing in the morning, Sirius was waiting downstairs when Severus came down the stairs, and, bypassing the dining hall, headed towards the hall leading to the exit.

"Severus, wait, we need to talk." Sirius was still wearing the same clothes he'd been in yesterday, his eyes swollen and his stubble pronounced. Severus wrinkled his nose, he hoped his husband would not come too close to him, he certainly smelled of sweat and digested alcohol.

Unfortunately, his hopes were not fulfilled as Sirius began walking towards him. Wanting to avoid unpleasant contact Severus subconsciously stepped back.

When Sirius saw this, he immediately stopped.

"Severus... Regarding yesterday." He fell silent for a moment, and lowered his gaze slightly, apparently gathering himself to say what he meant. Severus stopped and watched, waiting. He was expecting some rambling, insincere explanation of the events of that evening.

"I... It's not like that..." Sirius still couldn't find the words. Severus rolled his eyes, he didn't have the time or inclination to listen to this but he knew that if he didn't allow it now, Sirius would try to carry it out later. He remembered that they had had a practically identical conversation once before. There was nothing left to do but be patient.

Sirius gestured nervously with his hands. "I didn't mean to hurt you, okay? I was drunk, at first I didn't notice I was crushing you."

Well, that should be enough, Severus assessed, he had heard enough already. He lifted his chin with a contemptuous expression.

"Yes, yes. I know, you didn't want to kill me, you just wanted to beat me. I understand." He wanted to continue with his day already. "Just as last time you did not want to rape me, but to beat me up. I know it's always about the beating. Don't worry, I have learned you, so stop with this nonsense talk, with this pathetic explanation, and pretending to be ashamed, when in fact the only thing you feel like doing is beating me to blood. Enough already, ok? Duties are waiting for me."

Unconcerned by the shocked expression on his husband's face, Severus continued to speak in an indifferent, matter-of-fact voice without expression and walked towards him.

Sirius twitched as though someone had slapped him and looked as if he wanted to say something, but Severus didn't give him a chance, quickly passing him by and leaving.

The cold air enveloped him, dimming the anger burning within him. He was not going to let Sirius dictate his life, influence his mood. No more, they'd been away from Hogwarts for a long time. Only seven more years. That's almost half the time, it's not too bad, he can handle it.

Severus stopped for a moment and took a few deep breaths to calm himself. When he felt his pulse return to normal he moved forward. On the way to his shop he stopped by a couple of places to make necessary purchases, and slowly his anger evaporated.

In his own shop an owl was waiting for him with a message from Mr. Seamus so his mood improved even more.

Severus felt as if in him he had found a substitute for his parents, someone who cared about him, who would be proud of him, with whom he could talk about almost anything. The daily exchange of messages had become a habit for them, they usually wrote about interesting thoughts and ideas in the field of decoction making. The sight of an owl with a message made him feel more part of the world and less of an outcast as in his Hogwarts days. Someone personally sought contact with him, and such an excellent scientist for that matter. He quickly reached for the parchment to write back.

When he returned to Grimmauld Place in the evening, he saw a black leather box on the table in his living room. He walked over to it intrigued, picked up a card lying on it with "Happy Birthday" written on it, and looked at it carefully for a signature, but found nothing of the sort. Severus shrugged his shoulders and opened the box. Inside was an elegant and well-tailored men's wrist-length black gloves in very soft leather with small buttons on the side. He inspected them carefully from all sides, they seemed perfectly in his size. He put them back in the box which he closed and put it back as it had been before.

"Kreacher."

The elf appeared almost immediately.

"You summoned Kreacher?"

Severus pointed to the box with a motion of his head.

"Do you know who this is from?"

Kreacher nodded eagerly. "From Mr. Black, Mr. Snape."

"Thank you."

So this bloody spoiled idiot is going to try to bribe him with a gift. Severus sat down heavily in his chair and propped his head up with his hands for a moment. He didn't know what to do with it, send it back or keep it, which would end the matter quicker. Why couldn't Sirius just get over it? It wasn't the worst thing done to him. He was already used to being treated this way, after all, he knew who he would marry. It happened less often than he expected anyway.

That unfortunate event brought one improvement after all. From that day Sirius stopped accosting and attacking him at breakfast. Again Severus was able to eat his meal in peace, contemplating his plan for the day. Sometimes he would still stare at him, but as he said nothing, Severus could ignore it.

The only thing that had clearly become even more difficult was fulfilling the monthly duty. Even though Severus was firmly convinced that Sirius' behaviour was expected and hadn't shaken him in any way, his body clearly didn't agree with him, and for the first time since their unfortunate first night, to which, with the help of visits to the healer, Severus has learned never to return his thoughts, there was tissue damage. Sirius was as shocked by this as Severus was.

This took place a week after their row.

As reluctantly as ever, Severus entered Sirius's bedroom, left in semi-darkness, wearing only his nightdress, and without a word lay on his stomach on the bed, hiding his face in the pillow, the other placed under his hips, using Scourgify and a muscle-relaxing spell on himself. Sirius, as always, sat in the armchair in his bathrobe and watched, with a glass of wine in his hand. Just as Severus once demanded, he was not drunk. Finally he drank to the end, put it down and walked over to the bed.

Severus felt the mattress bend under his weight as he sat up, and after a moment he felt his nightdress being lifted to waist height, leaving him exposed. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to concentrate on something else, to escape into his head, but for some reason it was difficult to achieve this time. He drifted off and came back again. For a moment he felt every touch of Sirius very precisely, but he managed to concentrate on the potion he was working on, but only for a moment, in a moment he could feel every movement of his hips again.

It took an eternity. Frustrated, he clenched his teeth. The smell of alcohol reached his nose, he guessed that Sirius was probably more drunk than usual and that was why it was taking so long. His movements suddenly seemed more brutal than usual and his body heavier. But maybe he only thought it was so because he expected it.

It was very, very bad. He could feel the panic growing, too strong to control. Sirius apparently sensed his stress, because in a clumsy attempt to calm him down, he stroked him lightly on the back. Obviously this had the opposite effect to that which Black wanted to achieve, Severus felt the stress mounting, subconsciously tensing his muscles, his breathing becoming shallower.

Suddenly, he felt a sharp pain, which caused him to scream before he could control himself, and Sirius stood still.

Severus clenched his eyes and teeth, trying not to even flinch as Sirius slowly slid out of him. He hated it, it always made him uncomfortable, and now it simply hurt. When it finally succeeded he drew in a shuddering breath.

"Oh fuck!" The silence was broken by Sirius's voice and Severus immediately concentrated again. "I hurt you, you're bleeding."

Just what he needed. The mentally weary Severus closed his eyes for a moment.

Not knowing what he should do, whether to reach out and examine the damage with his fingers or just leave for a moment, he lay there wondering. What if, in the worst-case option, magic didn't see this as an act done?

Should they try to continue? Frantic thoughts ran through his head, he considered the options before deciding.

"Get out..." Severus muttered, even though they were in Sirius' bedroom. Surprisingly, he obeyed and left Severus alone so that he could inspect the damage in peace, while he himself went out to the bathroom.

Very carefully, with slow movements, Severus rose and stood up, put on his nightdress and, trying not to hurt the sore spot, began walking limply towards the bedroom door. Without even checking, he was aware that the tissue damage was greater than before, enough to make his life difficult for the next few days and to switch him to a liquid diet. He felt a slight tickle on his skin and became aware of drops of blood running down his thighs.

One small step at a time, he walked very slowly, barely able to move from the pain, not wanting to make things worse, and he knew he was facing a walk the length of the house.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, Severus repeated in rhythm with each step. The wound hurt with a sharp, piercing pain that he felt throughout his body. Yes, this was a much bigger injury than before. Still probably no bigger than 1cm after all, he won't die from it.

Wobbling, he had only managed to leave the bedroom and reach halfway through the living room when Sirius finished bathing and left the bathroom. Did it really take him a few minutes to make that short walk, thought a stunned Severus.

His husband, this time fully dressed in jeans and some sort of t-shirt paused for a moment at the

sight of him, then walked up to him with a quick step and held him by the waist while Severus had to try hard not to flinch.

"Fucking hell, we're going to have to call a doctor." The stress had had a sobering effect on him because not a trace of his intoxicated state was visible.

"Don't you dare! I can handle it." Severus would rather die than go to the doctor with such an ailment. How could he explain it? After all, they had already been married for three years, this should not have happened. While he was speaking, he stopped, and when he tried to walk again, an even stronger pain pierced him and he wobbled, supporting himself on Sirius. Severus clenched his teeth. What a mortifying situation.

"Don't struggle now, I'll carry you to your room." Severus wanted to automatically protest and started to push away with his hands when he noticed Sirius looking at the floor. He followed his gaze and felt a wave of heat wash over his face.

Between Severus's feet a spot of blood appeared on Sirius's cream fur rug, followed by another. Not much, tiny in fact, as much as would have oozed from a cut on his finger, but enough to make Sirius stare wide-eyed, pale, and finally reach out, putting both hands around Severus' waist and lifting him.

"Lean against me and hold on to my neck. I will not carry you bridal style, lest I cause you more pain."

Severus nodded and allowed himself to be snuggled against Sirius' chest, clutching his neck tightly.

He felt one of Sirius's hands tighten tighter around his waist and the other move to his thighs and stop there, enveloping his legs in a firm squeeze.

It was the most humiliating situation of his life. He would rather be hanging upside down again, hung by his leg, with his underpants in full view in front of the whole school, than be carried by Sirius, and accept help from him.

He hated himself for not being able to protest, but it was stronger than him, as soon as the weight of his body was lifted from his legs the pain eased immediately. With clenched eyes, trying not to breathe, he let himself be carried through the long, seemingly endless corridor until they reached Severus' room.

"Bathroom or bedroom?" Sirius's voice rang out all too close, just above Severus's head, vibrating slightly in his chest as he spoke.

"Bathroom."

The pain should have kept him alert, but instead Severus felt himself growing weary, his muscles seemed too heavy, all he wanted was to lie down and sleep.

"Ok, in a moment." To his surprise he felt Sirius lay him down on the bed. Before he could stop himself he quietly groaned as his body touched the mattress. What a shame. If he could, he would want to die now, or fall asleep and never wake up again.

Half-awake, he heard Sirius' footsteps moving away and after a while returning, the sound of water being poured into the bath came to his ears. He lay still for a few moments, becoming more and more sleepy until finally he felt Sirius pick him up again and lean him against himself like a ragdoll. Severus closed his eyes for a moment, when he opened them again he was in his spacious, mostly white furnished bathroom, Sirius was just putting him carefully into the hot bath, not paying attention to the fact that Severus was still wearing his nightdress. Once he had placed him in the water without asking permission he undressed him and discarded his wet clothes on the floor.

"Get out." Severus' voice was little louder than a whisper. He was so sleepy, so tired. His tense muscles were slowly relaxed in the hot water, the pain eased, and finally disappeared. He tried by sheer force of will not to fall asleep.

"No way, you'll fall asleep and drown. Check for injuries, I won't look." Sirius turned his back on the tub, giving Severus his privacy.

Severus felt more naked and vulnerable than ever before in his life as, trying to splash as little water as possible, so as not to suggest by sound what he is doing, he carefully examined the damaged tissue.

"How bad is it?" It was so out of character, Black asking about his condition, as if he hadn't tried to kill him before. Severus understood the reason for his interest, he wanted to have the monthly obligation fulfilled, but this did not make it at all easy to speak to him about such private matters. He reluctantly glanced in Sirius direction.

"Not really, nothing that won't heal within a few days."

Sirius turned his head slightly towards him, showing his profile, as if he wanted to look at him, but stopped at the last moment.

"It looked a lot more serious..."

Oh, shut up, will you do it, thought Severus, are you doing this on purpose? Frustrated for a moment, he bit his lower lip. All the while he felt his cheeks burning with humiliation, this false concern of Sirius and him, gentle as a virgin, this grotesqueness made him nauseous.

"It's just a shock reaction of the body, nothing significant. Weakness, sleepiness, it's all meaningless."

Sirius nodded. "That's good. Have a bath, no need to rush, take your time, I'll wait and carry you back."

From under his squinted eyelids, Severus looked at his husband's broad, sharp shoulders, and felt a growing irritation. This had one advantage, the more angry he was, the less sleepy he was.

At this announcement Severus felt a sudden urge to drown himself or Sirius. He wanted to be alone so that he could reflect on this regrettable event, but clearly Sirius wanted to "support" him. Now he felt guilty, and when he sent him to the werewolf he didn't feel it. Oh, it was such a small thing, wasn't it.

Not wanting to prolong the torment, Severus reached for his herbal soap and began to rub his body. After a while, he had Sirius give him a particular oil and poured a few drops from the bottle into the bath to speed healing. When he finally decided that he was clean enough, he dried himself with a drying spell, wrapped himself in a towel and only then let Sirius, stubborn as a donkey in this matter, carry him to the bed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you very much for all your comments!

With the previous chapter and already this one too, I had a little existential crisis, because something in the story made a few people delete all their comments, including the last one on this latest chapter.

Writing is just a hobby, a pastime and comments and kudos are the icing on the cake and no one is obliged to leave them so deleting a few shouldn't hurt so much, but I

can't help but wonder all the time what I did wrong.

Severus would rather die than face Sirius but he was too proud to show it, besides, the sooner he forgot the incident, the better. Fortunately, he didn't see him for a few days, not even showing up for breakfast himself, instead asking Kreacher to cook him porridge and deliver it to his bedroom. The wound was very small, practically insignificant, but located in such an unfortunate place that it opened with every violent movement and paralysed the body with pain. Never again, Severus promised himself, if he had mentally anaesthetised himself to unconsciousness with the calming potion before every monthly meeting, he was never going to let such a situation happen again.

Having no choice, he again did not open the shop for a few days, instead spending his days lying on his stomach, with the wound smeared with a homemade oak bark ointment to speed up healing, or taking warm water baths and making notes for the book he was currently writing. His mood was improved by letters from Mr. Seamus, who, when he heard about the "flu" that poor Severus had caught, sent him home a large basket of fruit and sweets with the note "get well soon". Severus didn't know if Sirius had seen it, but if he had, it was sure to become fuel for his silly fantasies and insinuations. Severus rolled his eyes, already bored by Sirius' talk that was yet to come.

He sat down on his side on the soft bedding and untied the ribbon holding the foil around the basket. One by one he took out and looked at the products he had been given. A bottle of raspberry juice, another of pomegranates, bunches of grapes, pineapple, apples, oranges, pears, tangerines, kiwis, and bananas. Plus a box of Honeydukes chocolates. Seveus spun them around in his hand - huh, this must wait for better times.

He collected everything back to the basket which he put on the floor by the bed, except for the tangerines which he peeled and ate piece by piece, enjoying their fragrance spreading all over the room.

The next day, to his displeasure, he was visited by Lily. Sirius apparently had to inform the Potters of the course of that evening. Damn him!

For a moment Severus considered admonishing him, but it would have been pointless, in vain; Sirius would surely have found justification for violating Severus' privacy and turned it against him.

There was nothing left for him to do but clench his teeth and pull himself together.

As soon as Kreacher announced her arrival Severus, not wanting to show weakness got out of bed and turned his nightdress into a robe before she had time to enter his living room. The only positive thing was that James didn't come with her, but that would probably have been too much even for him.

After a moment of expressing regret for his condition, which caused Severus to blush intensely, Lily moved on to the subject she had apparently come here with.

"Severus, Sirius is a normal human being. You cannot look at him all the time through the prism of how he was towards you when he was 16 or 17. Now he is 21 and he is someone else, he has grown up. He would want to have a good relationship with you, you know?"

Given their last few brawls and their intensity, Severus doubted these Sirius' reconciliation intentions.

Oh, so it's not even about him feeling bad, it's about Sirius' condition. How naive he was to be fooled for a moment. What a disappointment, but in fact he should have expected it. She's not his

ex-friend, Severus, she's Sirius' current friend. That's the way it is.

Severus closed his eyes for a moment, wanting to cut himself off from reality.

Breathing, that's the most important thing. Concentrating on breathing and counting in his mind to take his mind off triggering things, Severus repeated in his mind the instructions of the psychiatrist he was going to, with all his might trying to calm himself. Emotions, so many emotions he had to keep inside, to hide so the world wouldn't find out about them. Anger, disappointment, despair, desperation, a sense of rejection, loneliness, a sense of injustice, it was all he was made of, it filled every cell of his body.

Didn't Lily realise how much her words and concern for Sirius hurt? They cut like a blade, straight to the bone, straight to the heart. He felt tears coming to his eyes, he had to concentrate to stop them. He was silent for a while, fighting with himself until he won. Finally, he made sure that his voice did not shake.

"Touching. Did you say the same line to him and James about me being a human being when they fucked with me at Hogwarts or is it just that he's a human being and I'm not?"

Severus knew he had to have held back, but he allowed himself just a tiny bit, just a little bit of exposure of his weaknesses. He knew he would surely regret it later, but what the hell, he's just a human being too, whether Lily is aware of it or not.

"Of course I talked to them!" She spoke with such conviction, she believed it so passionately!

Severus only snarled at this, there was nothing more he could do, if he had allowed himself to do what his heart dictated he would have thrown himself on the bed weeping and screaming into the sheets until he was hoarse. Such luxuries, however, are beyond his reach. "It's very commendable, I will always have a debt of gratitude for it."

Lily twitched, as if struck. This was probably not what she was hoping for.

"Severus."

She walked over to him and touched him gently on the shoulder. Having a baby hadn't changed her appearance; she was still slim and looked young. Apparently James had not shirked his duties as a father and got up to see the baby at night as often as she did.

"I beg your pardon?" Severus stepped back slightly, not wanting to be touched by her or anyone else if he was to be honest. He was beginning to feel discomfort in his body, standing for too long and his muscles were beginning to make themselves known. Discreetly, he shifted from foot to foot.

"Sirius' depressed, he's seeing a psychiatrist at Muggle's clinic."

For some reason Lily thought he should care. He wasn't able to follow her train of thought. Did she seriously expect Severus to feel sorry for him?

"Oh? Touching! In what way is it my business, or I don't know what you are suggesting, maybe my fault?" He tilted his head slightly, trying to put on as indifferent a face as possible, tried not to show his growing discomfort, it was already enough that once Lily had seen him in his low moment, he did not want to have the image of a weak victim permanently fixed in her eyes.

"Give him a chance as a human being, he's trying to pull himself together, it's not easy for him."

Severus felt his throat tighten warningly, struggling to get his relatively natural-sounding voice out.

"And to whom is it? Life is not fair."

He turned his back. Yes, it wasn't cultured, but he preferred to behave rudely rather than show his glittering eyes. He blinked, trying to hold back the tears he felt gathering in the corners of his eyes.

"Stop, don't act like a child!" Lily was clearly starting to lose patience, but so was he.

He did not like being admonished by her as if she had the right to do so. Trying to preserve the remnants of his dignity, he walked to the window, where he stood breathing deeply until he regained control of his voice again.

"I don't know, maybe if he took care of something, would take up the work, and not just drank all day long his depression would go away? What do you think?" Contempt dripped from his voice. He hoped Lily would take it personally, she too was living the life of a rich slob, she who had a bright future ahead of her in education. What a waste.

"But he's doing something! He's an Auror, didn't you know that?"

Severus didn't know, but he wasn't about to admit it.

"They've lowered their standards a lot on recruitment."

Lily, poor as ever at reading the atmosphere again approached him. It wasn't surprising actually, she was a Gryffindor, they weren't famous for that. "Of course, because it's not like Sirius wasn't at the top of the class with science, is it?"

Yes, he was top of his class and now he was a slob drunk, Severus assessed. A splendid use of opportunity.

He had had enough. Maintaining the façade of an unmoved person without feelings cost a lot of energy and exhausted him.

The pain in his body was already severe, and he was tired both mentally and physically. He decided to dispense with further pleasantries. "Lily, I'm terribly sorry, but I have work waiting for me." He pointed to the notebook and quill lying before him. "Thank you for the invitation to join the Sirius fanclub, however, I must decline. But I am sure that in James you will find a devout follower of our poor Sirius."

Lily's indignation and disappointment was almost palpable. She stood still for a while, waiting to see if he would say anything more before she realised the conversation was over.

When she finally left, he threw himself on his bed and let his tears flow, and flow, until the pillow under his face became damp, sobbing until his head began to ache. Why did it still hurt so much after so many years, when would it lose its meaning?

His only value in her eyes was that he was Sirius' husband. Did she ever even like him? Was he the one who imagined their friendship? On the other hand, it shouldn't have surprised him, he knew what Lily was like. She cold-bloodedly pushed Petunia away from her after she found more interesting company, and then did the same to him, for James. He was so stupid to care, so very stupid!

Exhausted, he finally fell asleep. He woke up two hours later, still in his robe, his face wet with tears. He got up and clean himself up, he did not want any of the House Elves to see him in such a state.

He changed into his nightdress and, having nothing better to do at the moment, lay down again. So Black had a depression and a job. Both things were news to Severus. He cared little really, but he couldn't deny that he was surprised. Ok, by some miracle they had accepted an alcoholic for the Auror. Severus had no idea how he had done it, how he had managed to hide his addiction but he had clearly done it. All in all, if Black had to work somewhere the Auror's job would suit him, he

was very athletic and a good student, no surprise here.

And of course it sounded proud and dignified, so strange that it has not yet reached the esteemed ears of dear Walpurga. Because it didn't, if it had, the subject would surely have been raised at one of the obligatory family gatherings at the Blacks' modest mansion, only slightly smaller than that of their neighbours, the Windsors.

But this depression? It was something unexpected. Although, on the other hand, if one thought about it, it could have been predicted. Even someone as thick-skinned as Black could have been moved by this situation with Lupin. Severus was just curious as to how, according to Sirius and his friends, he himself was responsible for Black's poor mood.

He tried to avoid unnecessary encounters with him, not to talk when it was not necessary, not to invite anyone to Grimmauld Place, not to spend his money, to behave as if he were only a roommate, very little acquainted. It was Black who initiated the conversations and consequently the quarrels, not him. He would most willingly only meet him for the five minutes a month that were required of them by the Ministry and that was it.

Severus spent half the night pondering the subject.

All this ointment and care for himself took effect and just three days later Severus was back at work.

Everything was back to normal except for his marital duties. Whereas before this had been an inconvenience, now it had become a torture and a real disaster. In this respect, the situation looked just as bad, if not worse a month later, and the following month. Severus' body completely refused to cooperate, clenching so tightly that diastolic spells did not help. There was no way Sirius could take him without tearing his body in the process.

The first time they tried for a while but Severus felt a warning stab of pain and gave up, the second time Severus prepared himself with meditation, drank a calming brew but it didn't do much, either way it didn't work. It was a total disaster, for some time they could avoid it, but in the long run it could lead to the annulment of their marriage, now, after 3,5 years of sacrifice!

Sirius' attempts to solve the problem didn't help much, if anything, they only made things worse, further stressing Severus.

"How do you do it with your lover?" They were sitting at the breakfast table at the time, the next morning after the second failed act. Sirius was clearly furious with him and blamed him for these failures.

Well, there was no denying that he was right this time. Severus had no idea what he would have to do, but he knew that finding a solution was a necessity, not an option.

"None of your business." There was that subject again. Severus was curious when Sirius would realise he was making an idiot of himself.

Apparently, in his world there were only lovers and enemies and nothing in the middle. Of course, only in Severus' case, because he himself had friends. What transcended his reasoning was that the publisher was almost a father figure to Severus, someone like a friend, because he was not quite that, to whom Severus could turn with many issues and problems, but not with anything too private. But that was enough for Severus, it was a nice feeling to know that someone liked him and that someone cared about him. Yes, Sirius would definitely not understand that.

Now Severus had many people who talked to him, sought contact with him or invited him to dinner. However, he never developed any closeness with any of these people. He did not trust easily, and did not want to invest his feelings and friendship in something that would not be worth it. He preferred polite conversations and business meetings. This was what adulthood was about,

learning how to take care of himself and how to survive.

A sudden bang rang out as Sirius violently slammed the wine bottle on the table, somehow managing not to shatter it. Severus twitched slightly, trying not to show how badly he reacted to alcoholic displays of aggression.

Sirius's voice sounded cold and sharp, firm despite his clearly noticeable state of drunkenness. "And yet mine. We must do something about it, perhaps the method you use with him will help?" Their gazes met.

Black's grey eyes seemed as glassy from alcohol as ever. Well, yes, he's a depressed Auror who drowns his sorrows in alcohol. How touching. Severus shook his head. "No."

As Sirius stared at him with increasing fury, Severus did not relent and kept his gaze fixed on him. Would Sirius try to fight again? Severus' heart was pounding faster and faster, his discomfort growing.

Sitting opposite him, the tall, muscular man bent his lips in a slight grimace of mockery. "What can someone as cold in the bed as you offer someone?"

He skimmed Severus' face and figure with his eyes, evidently wanting to emphasise the unspoken "and so nasty" in this way.

Before Severus knew it his rage had taken over him. He bent his lips in clear contempt and disgust. "Fuck off you fucking idiot, or I'll get divorced and marry that...lover of mine."

Sirius looked surprised for a second. "You wouldn't do that!"

Severus just laughed and then jumped up from the table and ran across the room shouting, not caring that the House Elves could surely hear him. "Why do you think so? Should I stay with you out of sentiment? Marriage to you is a brake on my career! You should be grateful to me for wanting to stick with you!"

Severus noticed that under the table, still sitting Sirius had clenched his fists. He wondered how much longer it would be before he threw his fists at him again. Probably not long. This time, as a precaution, he already had his wand in his hand.

"You'd have to be remarried for ten years!"

Severus shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "But this time it could be out of love, so I wouldn't feel that way."

Sirius froze motionless, with his eyes wide open and his mouth slightly open. He looked like the epitome of shock. He looked at Severus as if he was seeing him for the first time, clearly such an option had not occurred to him before.

"Do you love him?" His voice sounded strangely scratchy, as if Sirius was having trouble speaking. Clearly such a possibility had not occurred to him earlier. Obviously, if Severus was dating and sleeping with someone, he would be doing it out of lust, not love. Pathetic and an incredibly annoying way to judge him.

Time stretched on, Severus could hear the clock hands ticking. Black, almond-shaped eyes focused on the white roses standing in the vase with their petal edges in various shades of pink. For a moment he considered whether he should lie, but he didn't feel like dragging out this farce.

"No."

He turned and walked away, leaving Sirius still sitting at the table and looking somewhere ahead with unseeing eyes.

Chapter Notes

I won't hide the fact that I added the scene of Severus and Sirius swapping roles in bed.

Warning!

From this chapter and for the next two chapters there will be a lot of smut.

Severus sat on the edge of the bed in his mid-calf nightdress. He had always felt out of place here, though he had been here many times. Black's bedroom was plunged into semi-darkness, but it was not so dark that Severus could not see fairly clearly the shape of Sirius sitting opposite him in the armchair, this time without a bottle of wine or even a glass in his hand. Severus felt very pathetic and vulnerable sitting like this with his back straight and his legs linked, his bare feet sinking into the soft carpet side by side, his hands resting in his lap and his long, shoulder-length hair parted down the middle. He looked like he was from Sunday school, he judged with distaste. He had been sitting there for several minutes now, and it had been an incredibly difficult experience. He felt his cheeks burn like fire, he hoped it wasn't visible.

Already for a long time he felt no fear when he had to spend those regrettable few minutes with Sirius. For the first year, maybe two, from time to time he was reminded of that fight, of Sirius' violence and hatred, of his willingness to hurt him even in that way, and it made Severus feel even more disgust and anxiety, but it never happened again, so slowly this unpleasant memory lost its shape until it became just another in the catalogue of Sirius' violence against him.

Although Severus had seen what his parents' marriage looked like and tried to avoid that pattern, he had the feeling that lately, step by step, they had been approaching that abyss, until finally they would fall into it and become the thousandth repetition in this old-world theatre. Sirius will play the violent alcoholic and Severus his terrified spouse.

Severus saw how his mother drank from her husband's mouth like life-giving water every word that could be interpreted as kind, how each time she clung to the hope that it was the last time, that now he would get better and everything would be fine. His father assured her that he would never take a drop of alcohol in his mouth again, he cried and assured Eileen of his love and she believed.

It never changed, of course, after a while his father became restless, easily angered, everything got on his nerves until finally he got drunk again and again there was violence and shouting and tears and panicky running around the flat with nowhere to hide. He did not want to fall into this trap, into this waiting for a nice gesture and into this despair when the blow came again.

Eileen's heart had been broken so many times that probably only keloid tissue remained there instead of tissue pulsating with feelings.

And Severus looked at it, at first in great horror, on the verge of madness, like his mother - in tears, with time showing less and less emotion, learning to mask it in order not to provoke his father with his fear, just as now he was trying not to provoke Sirius, because aggressors for some reason feed on fear. Severus did not understand what this was about, perhaps the abuser's self-disgust and sense of shame caused him to see the horror on his spouse's or child's face like a mirror in which he saw

all his hideousness, so he wanted to smash it with his fists?

Now he felt as small and weak as never before, completely defeated, all his mental armour cracked and he was a hair's breadth away from being smashed to pieces.

A few days ago, they tried to swap roles. The mere mention of this catastrophe caused Severus to be deeply embarrassed and to want to hide his face in his hands. Being the active side proved even more difficult than being the passive one.

Sirius suggested it after nothing came out of their typical arrangement for the third time.

Having no other choice, Severus agreed. As he readjusted his nightgown on him and turned from belly to side he saw his husband sitting on the bed next to him, dressed in his birth costume.

The sight of a naked Sirius, rather than making him excited, made him feel threatened and uncomfortable, so he immediately looked away.

The situation was made worse when Sirius flipped onto his back and spread his legs slightly, which Severus noticed out of the corner of his eye. He looked down at Severus' nightshirt. "You want help with that? You know I can think of something to make it more fun." Sirius' hand landed on Severus' thigh, who immediately twitched.

"Don't touch me!" Severus moved away violently then stopped. That was no good, he must pull himself together.

Sirius really thought he would be wanking before him? Sirius' gaze paralysed him, he touch of Sirius' hand burned his skin, he felt as if he had been soiled, and Severus did not bring his own hand even a millimetre closer to his crotch.

"Turn around." Severus definitely did not want Sirius to touch him or whatever he had in mind. When Black finally lay on his stomach, Severus reached down to his flacid penis and tried to get it up. Without success. His stress level had grown to dangerous levels, he felt very uncomfortable, unwell, even physically repulsed by the thought of touching Sirius and carrying it all out.

For a few minutes he tried, fully aware of Sirius' anticipation, but the more time passed the less physically possible it seemed. During the occasional wanking it could get hard without a problem, so the problem was not with it. Well, no reason to panic, there are other ways, he consoled himself in thought, he was sure he would come up with something.

"I don't want to rush you, but are you going to get on with it?" Sirius' voice brought him off balance. Now he knew that nothing would come of it this time.

Sirius apparently realised this too. "You know what, why don't we try it tomorrow, what do you say?"

Severus all he could do was nod and quickly run out of Sirius' bedroom.

Back in his bedroom a few hours later, after a long bath, Severus tried again to get hard and this time he succeeded. As he did so, he tried to concentrate on something sexual, related to Sirius. For a moment, he recalled the sight of his spread thighs and then of his naked buttocks, but it did not do anything sexual to him, Sirius looked like a beautiful sculpture and in the same way as the sculpture had a stimulating effect on Severus - it simply did not work that way. So Severus tried a different approach and soon began to imagine his dick inside him, this quickened his breathing and allowed him to finish faster. Still, the fastest he could reach orgasm was when he wasn't thinking about anyone in particular.

The next day the catastrophe was repeated. Severus could in no way force himself to have an erection, instead he got a panic attack.

Sirius tried to kiss him to get him in the mood, but the smell of alcohol and his too close proximity had the opposite effect. His breathing quickened and his whole body stiffened. Well almost all of

it, because his cock definitely didn't.

Sirius noticed this. "What's wrong?" He didn't sound angry, just tired. "Am I not attractive enough for you?"

Severus did not know what to say to this so he said nothing.

Sirius nodded, looking shocked. "I see, no problem, no problem, we don't have to do it that way, we'll figure something out."

But they didn't talk about it until the next month, apparently both of them were collecting their thoughts and thinking of options.

Then the day arrived. When Severus entered the bedroom Sirius immediately asked him to sit down and initiated the conversation himself. Severus had expected this to happen one day, so it did not surprise him. But it was the subject Sirius brought up that almost made him faint. Suddenly Severus found himself trying to find an argument against Sirius preparing him personally rather than by magic.

Sirius seemed very determined, which was a very expected reaction. He was too, but he still resisted what Black was proposing, it seemed too intimate, horribly humiliating and degrading. "Do you have any other ideas?" Black didn't seem particularly moved by what he was proposing, but no wonder, he'd had a lot more time to come to terms with it. With Severus it was different. "No..." He stared at him, still dazed, his eyes wide open, nibbling nervously at his lower lip with his teeth. He hadn't had a more embarrassing conversation in his entire life, even their first time was nothing compared to this.

"Let me try." His gaze bore into Severus, tried to force him into submission. Through the bathrobe, which was parted at the top, he could see Sirius' neck descending into a glimpse of his muscular chest, much to Severus' confusion. When he lowered his gaze he saw matching musculature to the chest, strong long legs. Too much nudity, far too much. He had to avert his eyes, this sight made him uneasy and increased his confusion.

"Why?" Severus preferred not to risk it with longer statements, not quite trusting his voice. The very thought of Black having to touch him, in such private places on top of that, and spending a long time doing so, watching and judging Severus's reactions caused him to panic and want to run away, which he only stopped by using reason.

"Because otherwise nothing will come of it." This was an argument Severus could not argue with. Which is not to say he didn't try.

"And this will miraculously make it work, yes?" He tried to speak ironically, but it didn't come out very well, and his voice trembled slightly, he was too nervous.

"I think so, or at least it's worth a try. It should work if the sex is more enjoyable for you." Sirius' confidence in the matter made Severus feel all the more like refusing, fighting the instinct to get up and leave. If it was possible, his face turned even redder.

"Maybe for you, because for me it's impossible." This conversation was too frank, too private. Severus closed his eyes for a moment and swallowed his saliva. He'd probably already preferred them to do what they were going to do despite his body's resistance, bleeding for days was nothing compared to this.

Sirius raised an eyebrow. Questioningly? Mockingly? It was hard to say.

"It doesn't do anything to me, I don't feel anything at the time." Severus whispered looking somewhere to the side. He felt obliged to add this, though he was sure Sirius knew it well, he had three and half of year to notice.

"Ok, then let me try."

Sirius straightened up in his chair, making a movement as if he was going to get up and Severus

shuddered slightly.

He felt he was losing, realised that in principle the decision had already been made, and now it was just a battle for time, trying to postpone the inevitable. Sirius probably already knew this too. Severus was like an animal driven into a corner, and he had driven himself there, or, more specifically, it had been done by his body reacting so badly to Sirius' violence.

"But do you know it's pointless?" His heart was pounding so loudly he was sure Sirius heard it. His mouth went completely dry, he felt like he was starting to shake, which absolutely couldn't be true, Severus wouldn't tolerate such humiliation.

"Nevertheless, let me. You will lose nothing from this." Sirius mellowed strangely, his voice losing its sharpness, sounding soft, patient.

Severus felt him cover himself with goosebumps, all the tiny hairs on his body rising, his muscles growing taut, ready to flee.

This impersonal copulation, the few minutes during which they did what the law required of them, was much easier to accept than this deliberate physical contact, dedicated to giving him sexual pleasure. The very concept of experimenting on his body made him nauseous, it made the act very personal, something he had to consciously participate in. It was repulsive to him, he felt a physical revulsion at the thought that the man who had tormented him for years and tried to kill him would now deliberately touch him, and in places that, if it were up to Severus, would never be touched.

"You're the one who thinks that. Maybe to you someone's fingers inside you don't make a difference, to me they do." The words bumped into each other, stumbled as he said it all in one breath. At last he pronounced aloud what Sirius tried to persuade him to.

Through the sound of his pulse humming in his ears, the sound of accelerated breathing suddenly broke through, as if someone was hyperventilating. Severus tried for a moment to collect his thoughts and locate the source of the strange sound before he was completely mortified to realise that it was him breathing like that. He violently held his breath, trying to hide it, to contain it somehow. It was all he needed, to become a laughing stock for Sirius and his friends. "Severus was shaking like a rabbit and panting like a cow." Humiliated, he closed his eyes and, unable to hold his breath any longer, drew a shuddering breath.

Sirius, however, did not look amused. He was thinking intensely, apparently looking for a way to break his husband's growing panic.

"Oh, do you prefer yours fingers then?"

What? Severus opened his eyes wide, blinked and reddened like a beetroot.

Anyway, it had worked, it had definitely knocked him off his train of thought, he pulled himself together. Sirius, even if he tried, would not be able to say anything more stupid than this.

"Ha ha, very funny Black." Severus brushed back his hair and drew a deep breath. He was slowly regaining control of himself, good.

"It wasn't meant to be funny, I was seriously thinking about it." Sirius smiled slightly, but without malice. He too was clearly trying his hardest, his future depended on it.

"Why would I do that?" Severus looked at him as if Sirius had grown a second head. What an absurd thing to ask, he did not understand what Sirius had in his mind to even think about it. Do others do this? Does he do so? It was beyond Severus's ability to understand and there wasn't much of that sort of thing.

"Let me try, I'll show you."

Severus rolled his eyes. Black was as stubborn as a donkey. For a moment he felt strong again, he was himself again.

"Okay, but only once. And don't blame me for your disappointment." Severus hoped he could maintain control, he felt panic sweeping over him again. He looked around as if searching for an

escape route. He didn't understand this delight in sex, this striving for it. It did not give him any pleasure. He didn't know what was wrong, whether it was him or what they were doing, or whether it was the lack of affection between them that mattered.

Sirius smiled broadly, as if with a shadow of relief, but perhaps Severus was only imagining it.

He picked up his wand lying on the table beside him. "Accio wine and glasses."

He poured into both of them and approached Severus. "Have a drink, it will help you relax." Then, he sat down on the bed beside him, thankfully not close enough for them to touch. Severus looked at the wine in the glass for a moment, he usually did not drink and if he did, he only drank very weak alcohol. He generally disliked contact with alcohol very much, but it was unavoidable and he did not want to get the reputation of an even bigger freak.

Sirius sipped from his glass and watched him with his head tilted. He looked confident, unmoved by what he was about to do.

"You don't usually drink?"

Huh, of course, something like that he had noticed, how could he not. Severus remembered that they had already had a similar conversation a few years ago.

"No." He shook his head, but still, despite his words, raised his glass to his lips and took a sip. The wine was very good, not too bitter, not too sweet, and left a delicate taste of cherries in his mouth. Observed by Black's watchful gaze, he took another sip.

"But you do sometimes?"

Severus nodded, drank the wine to the end and set the glass down on the floor. "Social norms."

Sirius nodded. Out of the corner of his eye, Severus saw his husband move closer to him. His breath quivered as he gasped violently.

"Take off your nightdress."

Severus nodded wordlessly and obeyed the command, pulling the garment over his head and depositing it on the floor. He hoped Sirius would not laugh at his thinness.

"I'll kiss you now, ok?"

Severus, the completely petrified with stress nodded his head and closed his eyes. He felt Sirius embrace him by the waist and draw him even closer, so close that Severus could smell his aftershave and the whiff of his breath on his face. He squeezed his eyes even tighter, his muscles straining to the limit. Sirius began to kiss his jaw and neck in tiny kisses, moving to his face, kissing his eyelids and lips, all the while just as gently.

Severus could hear his own broken, sob-sounding breathing and wanted to drop dead from embarrassment. Sirius' other hand smoothed his tense shoulders, trailing circles on his back. He did not rush him, patiently getting him used to his presence and what he was doing, until Severus' breathing returned to normal. Then he gently pushed him until Severus was lying on his back.

When an embarrassed Severus slumped awkwardly onto the mattress, he already regretted having agreed. This time Sirius would not cover his nakedness with himself and end it as quickly as possible, instead he would put his fingers up his ass. Something Severus hated even more than the whole act, it was disgusting and humiliating. As he thought about it, he felt a blush pour down his face and neck, but that actually shouldn't surprise anyone, it was a natural reaction in such a situation.

Sirius' kisses became more passionate, sucking and lightly nibbling his skin, caressing his neck with his lips and tongue while Severus lay rigidly accepting it. Sirius' right hand traveled up his thigh until it reached Severus' flaccid penis. His hand was slippery, clearly Sirius had used some kind of spell.

"Nhh...." Severus raised his hands and rested them against Sirius' chest, trying to push him away. A touch to such private place caused him to jerk away, instinctively trying to escape.

Sirius bit lightly on his ear.

"Are you working on a new book now?" Severus could not have been more surprised when Sirius' voice suddenly rang out near his ear.

"Yes." He whispered, not knowing what was going on, and his hands stopped in mid-motion, still touching Sirius' firm chest.

Between more kisses, Sirius continued to ask him.

"What will it be about?" His breath tickled Severus' skin. He concentrated on the answer.

"It will be a workbook with my original spells." His voice trembled slightly, but less than before.

"How many spells do you already have?" Sirius' hand did not stop caressing Severus' body, which was very slowly beginning to respond.

"Oh, dozens, but still not enough for a book." Concentrated on answering, Severus didn't even notice that Sirius had descended with his mouth to his chest and had begun to caress his nipples with his tongue.

"Oh..." A surprised sigh escaped his lips.

"Tell me about your favourite spells." Sirius' breath tickled his saliva-damp nipple.

It was a strange feeling, Severus didn't know how to name it. After a moment, he concentrated on the question and began to talk about spells, Sirius meanwhile trailing a string of kisses down his stomach. As soon as Severus stopped speaking Sirius lightly nibbled his tender skin. "Go on, tell me more." So Severus talked and talked, and the lower Sirius went down with his kisses the more breathy his voice became, and he could feel more and more blood flowing into the lower regions of his body. Finally, as Sirius' mouth closed around his erect penis he made a sound that was half scream and half stutter, Sirius took no notice and continued to caress Severus in ways he never would have thought possible.

To his embarrassment, every now and then, moans and gasps came from his throat, which he could not control. Finally, seeing no other option, Severus closed his eyes and surrendered to it, letting the feeling consume him.

His fingers clawed at the sheets and his body arched, his neck tilted back, his hair spilling over the pillow as he began to wriggle. Sirius held his hips with a strong grip and continued his display until, to his embarrassment, Severus almost wailed and came in his mouth. Only when his body stopped convulsing in spasms of pleasure did Sirius lift his head from his crotch and let go of his hips.

"Oh fuck..." It wasn't the most eloquent thing to say but it was all Severus could manage. For many minutes he lay panting, recovering. It lasted an embarrassingly short amount of time, but it was far more enjoyable than the usual wanking.

"Well?" Severus hadn't even noticed when Sirius shifted and was now sitting beside him on the bed. This shook him awake. Suddenly he realised that he was lying on his back, with his legs and arms spread, covered in droplets of sweat, stretched completely naked in front of Sirius. With a quick movement, he turned onto his stomach and looked at the man sitting beside him.

"As if you didn't know." He looked away. "Ummm... What about the rest of the plans?" He felt incredibly stupid asking this, would have loved to hide his face in the bedclothes, but of course he didn't. Sirius watched him with a satisfied smile.

"I think that is enough for today. Now that you know it's not so bad we can revisit it tomorrow."

Severus thought for a moment, that sounded good. He would have to go through it all over again, but now that the stress had let go he felt very weary.

"Ok."

Sirius, still in his bathrobe got up from the bed. "Now I have chores to do, if you wish then rest here, I won't be back until the night."

Severus nodded. A moment's nap would do him good.

Chapter Notes

Warning: smut. Basically the whole chapter is smut, if anyone doesn't like it I recommend skipping it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As Sirius had said, the next time was easier. Severus still would rather not be here than be here, and he felt uneasy as he walked into his bedroom for the second time this month, but he also felt a tiny, really minimal excitement.

He couldn't concentrate at work all day, he managed to mess up a Blemish Blitzer for a client, his hand shook as he measured the ingredients and instead of a concoction that would get rid of acne, the result was a concoction that caused baldness and dry skin. Uhhh, this is absurd! Severus could not remember the last time he had made such a mistake. In exasperation, he threw the damaged preparation into the trash, put the rest of the ingredients neatly in their place on the shelf and left his laboratory. It was a much better idea not to do anything today, he could not afford such a waste of goods. There was no point in staying there, so he closed the shop an hour early and returned to Grimmauld Place.

He took a long, herb-scented bath in his bathroom and washed his hair with a shampoo that left it as shiny and silky as ever. It was because of this shine that he was called an oily git. Poor little Sirius, having to touch oily Snivellus, how sad!

Once he was wiped dry with a thick towel, he looked at himself carefully in the big bathroom mirror. Usually he did not do it, generally he was not much interested in how he looked, but now for some reason he felt the need to do so. Probably the fact that he had an appointment at Sirius in half an hour had nothing to do with it, he thought ironically. Under his critical gaze he turned in front of the mirror and assessed.

He looked better than he expected but still very far from what was considered attractive. His skin was uniformly pale, very sparsely haired, and where hair appeared it was as black as that on his head. His shoulders were definitely not broad but a bit broader than when he was a teenager, his chest was slim and narrow, hairless, with all his ribs pronounced, his waist was very narrow, a tad narrower than his narrow hips, his abdomen was flat, his legs were lean but sprightly from being constantly on the move. There wasn't even an ounce of fat on him, just the sheer tendons and a bit of muscle. No doubt he wasn't a catch, but he wasn't as frighteningly thin as when he married Black either. Eventually, he decided he had seen enough. With a flick of his wrist, he put on his nightdress, used his Scourgify on himself with the other and he was ready.

In the bedroom the light, as always, was dimmed, just a few candles hovering over the bed. The scent of roses and sandalwood came from somewhere, but Severus could not locate the source of it. Sirius this time was only in a towel wrapped around his hips, as he stood up and approached Severus, as he had never done before. Severus felt his mouth go dry, Sirius was much more powerfully built than he was, it made him feel overwhelmed, he didn't like it.

He wasn't massive, but he undoubtedly had the body of an athlete, with broad shoulders, pronounced muscles on his chest, a six pack on his belly and a narrow path of black hair leading

down to the areas covered by the towel. Severus stared at him, struggling to swallow his saliva. Yes, Sirius' appearance was very intimidating, he felt small and emaciated next to him.

When Sirius approached him and placed his hands on his hips Severus did not retreat, standing allowing such an intimate gesture. Sirius stroked his body through the material, then grasped the scrap of his nightgown and lifted it slightly.

"Can I take this off you?"

Severus thought for a second, in conscience there were reasons against it. He nodded.

When Sirius undressed him this time, he didn't seem as horrified and disgusted as he had on their first night. But he probably had time to get used to it, having seen him naked already yesterday. A large, strong hand moved across his slim, flat stomach, stroked his hip, descended to his buttock. Severus closed his eyes and let out a shuddering exhalation ; it was too much, had to try not to push him away.

After a moment, he felt lips kissing his neck, so he tilted his head to make more room. It was still an unfamiliar situation for him, but no longer so frightening, he knew he could handle it. If Sirius hadn't been smelling of alcohol surely things would have been even easier, but Severus hadn't asked him to give up wine that evening, it could have backfired and Sirius could have asked why and Severus wasn't going to talk about it. Well, you can't have it all, Severus judged, but it was still much better now than before, so he wasn't complaining.

As Sirius moved with kisses to his face and then his lips, Severus returned the kiss for the first time, trying to repeat Sirius' movements. It was not so difficult.

Severus was the first to initiate the deepening of the kiss, parting his lips, thus giving a signal to Sirius who immediately understood. He did not want to behave like a frightened virgin on the wedding night, despite the awkward and difficult situation in which he found himself, he wanted to be equal to him. If he could do no more, this much he could do. This was their first real kiss, Severus realised. The disgust he felt early on has vanished, replaced by curiosity. Yes, it was still strange and made him uneasy, but he guessed that would pass in time.

Kissing him, Sirius led him over to the bed. This time Severus didn't need a drink when he let Sirius take him by the hips and plant him on the bed. His heart pounded like a hammer as Sirius knelt between his legs.

He was still slightly anxious and ready to flee if necessary, but the now that Severus knew what to expect, the sight made him start to harden. Sirius smirked and licked his lips, looking straight into the dilated pupils of Severus, who felt extremely emotionally naked and vulnerable, handing him full control of himself.

When Sirius finally took him in his mouth Severus was almost completely hard. He welcomed his caresses with moans and mumblings that if one listened hard enough sounded like pleading. Sirius, all the while sucking and licking him, maneuvered Severus' hips until he laid him on the bed and moved him to the centre, and as Severus surrendered to the waves of pleasure he suddenly slid an oil-covered finger into him.

The petite, skinny body twitched, his mouth wanted to say something but at that moment Sirius began to suck harder and whatever Severus did not want to say was forgotten, his breathing quickened, became shallow, every now and then it turned into a moaning. It was just as good as yesterday, or perhaps even better because he didn't feel any anxiety right now.

His husband skillfully prolonged the caresses while the first finger was joined by the second. At this Sirius stopped, instead concentrating on what he was doing with his mouth. When Severus came, he let him rest for a moment, still kneeling between his legs and lazily moving his fingers inside him, just enough to keep him open.

As his breathing calmed Severus lifted his eyelids and looked at Sirius. The man sat across from him, his lips glossy and red. He caught Severus' gaze.

"Shall we continue?"

Severus nodded, not at all sure he wanted to, but all in all he had no choice, it was more of a courtesy question on Black's part.

It was only a moment later that he felt the fingers inside him begin to move more with purpose, for a moment they slid into him in circular motions and poked him inside when suddenly Severus felt as if someone had turned on the pleasure button inside him and lit fireworks, he screamed and threw himself down on the bedclothes, shocked, all the embarrassment that threatened to descend upon him has vanished.

Sirius smirked. "That's it, that's it." He obviously whispered to himself. His fingers hit that point regularly. Every nerve in Severus' body seemed to glow, he could feel his body wrapped in warmth, his mind went blank.

The throbbing pleasure was growing, tingling sensation increased becoming too overwhelming, Severus couldn't handle it.

The feeling was strange, he didn't know how to describe it, he didn't associate it with anything. That is until he suddenly associated it with something. He jerked violently and clenched his thighs, wielding Sirius' hand.

"Stop, stop!" Uhhh, that was so embarrassing.

Sirius stilled immediately and looked at him expectantly. Severus took a breath and tried again. "I have to go to the bathroom..." He grew more nervous, not used to telling Sirius he wanted to use toilet. What a disgraceful situation!

"Oh, really?" Weren't you in the bathroom before you came to me?" He raised an eyebrow. For some reason he seemed both amused and proud. "I'm not touching your bladder.

Severus felt like killing him. "I was." He wriggled slightly, trying to free himself which caused Severus' fingers to touch the spot again. A moan escaped Severus' lips and his head tilted back.

Black just smirked and started moving his fingers again, until Severus tilted his head back and whined, at the same time clenching his thighs tighter.

"No, you don't have to, believe me. Let it go, I promise you won't want to pee."

Had he gone completely mad? Did he want Severus to do it on him? Not going to do that, he clenched his teeth and tried to break free again, but Black was much stronger than him.

"Severus, stop fighting, believe me, I know what I'm saying. Let it go, let it go, try to pee, you'll see what happens, I'm taking the risk."

Severus threw himself across the bed, tossing his head from side to side, his hair spilling with each movement. A strong hand held him by the hip, pressed against the mattress.

"Let it go, Severus, come on." Sirius tempted and urged, until finally Severus gave in and tried, accepting the humiliation to come. To his surprise, he did not wet himself, but his whole body was shocked, as if he had grabbed a bare wire, it was like a bolt of electricity shot through his body.

When he looked down he saw cum mixed with a transparent liquid oozing out of him, which surprised him a lot. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Sirius's satisfied face between his thighs, a sight so utterly obscene that Severus had to close his eyes.

When that orgasm took over his body he let out a breath and a very audible moan and then another and another, it was like a euphoric feeling washing over his whole body. Severus' thoughts drifted away and came back, above him he could vaguely see Black's face. He blinked trying to concentrate, but before he could Sirius hit the spot again and Severus threw his head back with a

groan and drifted off again into pleasure.

He was oblivious to the fact that with his face flushed, covered in droplets of sweat, with his long black hair scattered across his pillow and his fingers digging into the bedclothes arching, he was writhing, screaming and moaning, held by his hips with one hand by Sirius. This went on and on, with no real immediate descent as when Sirius took him in the mouth.

When he finally finished coming, he lay panting, still trembling slightly, feeling a strange lightness throughout his body, with reddened, moist lips, tears of pleasure on his cheeks. He was very weary, unable to move, and shocked by what had happened.

"It wasn't so bad, don't you think?"

Sirius looked suspiciously pleased with himself, but Severus was too blissful to argue with him now. This could wait.

"Trust me, I know what I'm doing, ok?"

Severus could only nod his head. Here, he had to agree with him, Sirius clearly knew better than he did.

His gaze was drawn down for a moment by the drops on his stomach. He would have to examine the fluid later, he promised himself. He was curious how much Sirius was wrong. But that was later, now other things were more important.

"Ok, I'll take you now." A low, lust-filled voice rang out.

Severus didn't care, but, as he still hadn't recovered, it was actually a good idea, possibly allowing Sirius to finish before Severus regained focus of thought and feeling. He suddenly became so sleepy and helpless, he almost couldn't keep his eyelids open but tried to fight himself and look at Sirius, not run away from him. He started to flip over onto his stomach when Sirius' hand gently touched his hip. "If it's not too much, then stay as you are. I'd rather see your face."

Sirius took off his bathrobe, stripping naked in front of Severus for the first time, but Severus closed his eyes, not wanting to look at him. He feared the sight of Sirius naked might stress him out and he didn't need that. He felt his husband climb on top of him and with his body spread his knees again.

Moments later he felt Sirius leaning over him, his face inches from his face.

He didn't care. But even so, he warned just in case. "Don't hold me."

Black nodded his head in acknowledgement and stayed away from his wrists.

Severus tilted his head slightly and lay back, feeling the pleasant buzzing of his system.

Sirius slowly pushed inside, covering his mouth with his lips as he let out a moan. Still pleasantly relaxed, Severus hardly noticed the discomfort as he entered him. The pain was much less than usual, almost non-existent.

Once he was inside him, Sirius paused for a moment, his eyes closed, teeth clenched as if in exertion. Severus assessed the feeling, concentrating on the sensations. This time, instead of the strange, simply unpleasant feeling of fullness, there was another, still fullness, but every millimetre of his body that came into contact with it felt as if tiny sparks were passing through it. He didn't have an erection but it didn't bother him, Sirius didn't seem to care either, and for that matter Severus decided to trust him.

Sirius kissed him, putting him into a state of absolute relaxation, before slowly lifting his hips and pushing into him fully. Each thrust became more pleasurable than the last, this time he didn't defend himself when Sirius maneuvered his hips, he was too unaware to even notice, his mind was veiled with the pink haze of pleasure.

At one point he became aware that his hips were bucking, going against the movement of Sirius' hips. His body found the rhythm on its own and moved in this dance that was unfamiliar to him. Even though he was lying down, he felt like he was dizzy, like he was falling, so he put his arms around Sirius' neck and clung to him, holding on to him tightly, so very tightly.

Finally, he began to moan again, the heat in the pit of his stomach increasing, spreading down his entire body. Sirius was kissing him again, and Severus, completely unaware of what he was doing wrapped his arms around him, and moved in unison with him, pursuing what was bringing him so much pleasure.

"Oh, God, oh God..." Severus was writhing on the bedclothes.

"Am I your God now?" Laughed Sirius in a husky voice. "That goes fast!"

"Shut up, Sirius." Severus didn't even lift his eyelids, too lazy with pleasure but gathering strength to admonish Black. That was what he always had the strength for!

"Oh, have I become Sirius again?" The goon was mocking him and feeling far too comfortable.

What was that supposed to be, a flirtation? Ok, he will flirt too in that case.

He slightly lifted his eyelids and met his husband's eyes. "Sirius, please, please!"

This caused Black to smile a satisfied smile. "What do you want? Tell me!" Of course, Sirius immediately fell for it.

"Shut up at last!"

Sirius began to laugh. "Ah, you little...!" He didn't finish and instead bit him on the neck, then he propped himself above him on an elbow, his long hair hanging over Severus as he leaned over his face and sometimes kissed him, taking his breath away and sometimes sucked, licked, kissed and lightly bit his neck which caused a series of moans to come out of the throat of the boy lying beneath him.

Severus didn't notice the sounds he produced, the moans and pleas, the whimpers and gasps that filled the room, but Sirius clearly did, each moan from Severus' mouth causing Sirius to move with more need, more necessity, more precision hitting this place that gave him pleasure.

Potion master watched, from under half-closed eyelids, Black's concentrated face moving slightly up and down above him, so close to his own, his brow drawn down. It was so unreal, strange, out of place and yet it was happening. He couldn't drift away in thought for too long because Sirius' hip movements were pulling him back and making him crave, more and more.

Severus' hands danced over Black's shoulders and back, drawing him close, leaving red nail marks all over him.

Thoughts fled his mind, he became only senses, his whole being concentrated in nerve endings. To his shock he came even harder than before, his whole body was twitching and shaking in pleasure, feeling an incredible euphoria. Severus struggled to catch his breath, as from miles away he could hear Sirius's comments praising him, as pleasure and bliss coated every cell, every nerve in his body and stayed there for a long time.

Already he knew that no other type orgasm could compare to this, no other form of sex bringing him such mindblowing pleasure.

Now he was tired, so very tired. Sirius kept moving inside him, and Severus was too weary to protest. Besides, it was not unpleasant.

Finally, he felt Sirius' dick throbbing, his body tighten and freeze in stillness above him, and then, panting into his neck, he sank part on top of him, part on the mattress, and Severus let him. After a few minutes, Sirius finally moved away from him, instead lying partly on his side, facing him, partly on his back, leaning against the pillows.

Severus was still breathing heavily, his eyelids had become so heavy, his mind was shutting down. Under normal circumstances, he would have long since gone to himself and taken a shower to wash away Sirius' traces, but these were not normal circumstances.

Instead, he lay too exhausted to get up, completely indifferent to his and Sirius' nakedness, to the fact that he lay next to him looking at him.

He understood none of this. This time nothing ejaculated, the orgasm was dry. Severus decided he would have to ask Sirius about it or look up information about it in books.

"How? Why?"

He turned his face towards Sirius, his voice still breathy.

"Don't you know the prostate works like that?" His voice was much less breathless than Severus'. Well, he was obviously in better shape.

Severus shook his head, his black hair following his head movement. He had, of course, studied human anatomy, but there was no particular focus in the lessons on the prostate specifically, and there was not a word in the scientific textbooks about the prostate working in this way either.

"This is how it should always be. In a perfect world, that is." Sirius reached out his hand and ran his finger over Severus' heaving abdomen, smearing droplets of sweat and cum.

"You managed to achieve an anal orgasm." With a one movement of his wand he cleared them both. "This is a rare gift, mind you. Not everyone manages to do it, some people can learn it, others can't, but you clearly do. And very well, I couldn't ask for more."

"Oh." It wasn't the most intelligent statement, but it had to be enough. And it was enough, judging by Severus' satisfied smirk.

A conceited buffoon, Severus assessed.

"Can you do that too?" It was a very invasive question, but since he was so exposed, Sirius could be too.

Sirius shook his head. "Unfortunately, I'm not so lucky. But on the other hand, you had a sensational lover. If I had fucked myself, I probably would have too." Sirius began to laugh, amused by his joke, and Severus could only look at him from the corner of his eye in disbelief. And this was a grown man!

"Go fuck yourself then," Severus muttered, and Sirius began to laugh.

Chapter End Notes

I'm worried there's too much smut 🙈

Will a successful sex life improve their relationship?

Chapter Notes

This is the last chapter with smut, from the next one the usual content will appear again!

They said nothing for a while, and his eyelids became too heavy for him to hold them open. He slowly drifted off into sleep.

"You didn't sleep with that guy, did you?" Sirius' voice brought him back to consciousness.

"Ummm...?" He slightly averted his eyes, trying to understand the meaning of the question. With what guy? Ohhh, right, he forgot, according to Sirius, Mr. Seamus is his lover. "Why do you ask that?"

"Simple curiosity... You seemed very surprised by a prostate orgasm, which is perfectly understandable, let alone something as basic and obvious as a blowjob. So there are two possibilities, either you haven't slept with him, or the guy is exceptionally bad in bed and doesn't care about you at all."

The black eyes averted more. Sirius was really interested in whether his supposed lover cared about Severus? This is something new.

"Answer that question for yourself, but keep in your mind that we have been married for almost four years, and yet the things you have mentioned have surprised me."

Severus expected Sirius to get pissed off and start cursing, so he was surprised to find that Sirius instead leaned over him, and started running a finger over his mouth.

"Right, that's true, but it's not my fault, as we both know. If you'd let me, it would have been like this from our first time, but you didn't want it, you didn't allow it, and I wasn't going to force you." For a moment, he slid his fingertip between Severus' lips and moistened them with his own saliva. Severus didn't defend himself against it, let him do what he wanted, he still had no control over his muscles. Just his eyelashes fluttered in surprise when his husband leaned over him and kissed his lips.

"So you two haven't slept together.... Interesting. Does he treat you with such respect, like a lady or gentleman, whichever you prefer, or is it you who chose not to, because you're married?" His face was only inches above his again as he stared into his eyes, a shadow of a smile playing on his lips.

"What do you want from me?" Severus moved his face aside.

"I'm just curious. You've been seeing each other since at least October..." He reached out and held Severus by the cheek, turning his face in his direction again. "Just tell me."

Severus stared into the pale grey eyes. "Are you following me?" Would Black really be so bored to do that? After all, he was working as an Auror, it was bound to keep him busy.

"I told you I saw you two outside the restaurant."

Ah, right. Not feeling like explaining himself, Severus closed his eyes. For the first time in his life, he was not bothered by the presence of a man lying next to him; somehow, the orgasms he had experienced had momentarily removed the contours of life and made everything just blurry, like a pastel painting. It was an unreal experience.

Severus felt light and at ease talking to Sirius, which didn't mean he intended to approach him any differently than usual.

"Give me a break, Black. If you're curious about this, ask him."

Sirius leaned over and bit his shoulder, and Severus yelped in surprise and opened his eyes. He too apparently also felt more natural and at ease with Severus, quite as if he didn't hate him.

"But I'm closer to you, and I'm asking you." Black was getting too comfortable.

Severus rolled from under Sirius and raised himself on his elbows.

"Why should I tell you about my life? Nothing has changed between us, that what we do in bed does not affect the other areas of our lives."

Sirius flipped onto his back. "You're such a whiner."

Without looking, he blindly reached out with his hand and held Severus by the shoulder. "Stay."

It was tempting, Severus' eyes closing of their own accord again. But he wanted there to be no misunderstanding between them, just in case.

"You don't think the pleasure of my loins will take away my clarity of thought and influence my decisions, do you?"

Sirius just laughed.

"You know how to put it all nicely." He then watched Severus closely, getting on his nerves with this.

"Are you still...ummm...are you still..." Black clearly couldn't find the words.

Severus looked up curious at this strange behaviour. He raised an eyebrow questioningly.

Sirius brushed back his hair and sighed. "Did the memory of our wedding night affect your feelings of pleasure during sex?"

Ah, that's what this was about!

"I try not to think about it. Yes, it was aberrant behaviour, but I did not lie when I said that I expected it from you and that it did not traumatise me." Severus was not sure whether he was trying to convince Sirius or himself. Possibly both. At his psychotherapist's, on the other hand, he discussed it for hours, every detail, until it lost all focus and he felt like it was someone else's story.

Sirius twitched as if struck. He was silent for a moment. Finally, slightly uncertainly, as if afraid of the answer, he looked at Severus.

"I swear I regret it every single day!" His grey eyes darkened like a stormy sky. "Do you still judge me like that?"

Severus could hardly refrain from rolling his eyes. That it was just now that Sirius had come to such talk!

"No, I judge you a bit differently now. Don't ask about it, ok? It's not the best time to have this kind of conversation." He hoped this would cut off the subject.

In fact it did. Sirius lay back and pondered, until finally, apparently, he acknowledged the rightness of Severus' request and just rolled to the side, so that he was spooning Severus' side.

If he were not so sleepy, he would have moved away and gone to his bedroom, but because he was, he fell asleep instead.

Since their sex had changed it put Sirius in a good mood so noticeably that even Severus took notice. The man seemed relaxed and in a carefree, he drank less at breakfast, and generally approached Severus more pleasantly, his step became light, the atmosphere in the house changed completely.

So little was needed for Sirius to be happy, Severus judged with distaste, not even love, just someone willing to have sex is enough for him. If Severus had known this early on he would have

gone to bed with him while he was still at Hogwarts and would not have had any problems with bullying on his part, probably then Black would not have tried to kill him either.

Reluctantly in front of himself, he had to admit that they now did this frequently, several times a week, or even several times a day, and what annoyed Severus even more, quite often he himself initiated it.

He wasn't ashamed of telling Sirius to fuck him, rather that he enjoyed being fucked so much. Unbelievable how the novelty of something makes it interesting! It was such a strange feeling, at the same time he felt bad and strange in the company of Sirius, restless, worried, insecure and deep inside he was afraid of him, and at the same time he felt an irresistible lust, when he saw him he felt hot and wanted to touch him. His body woke up and began to have the needs of a 21-year-old man. It was as if the dam built of his inhibitions had collapsed and all the needs he held inside poured out.

A few days later, when he was alone, fresh and clean after a bath, he decided to examine his prostate. His oil-covered fingers explored inside him for a while as he stood in the bathroom with one leg resting on the edge of the tub and with a concentrated expression he tried to find the spot. In the past it wouldn't have even occurred to him to do something like this, he judged by manoeuvring his finger, but it was now and he wanted to know. After a few tries, he knew he had found it when his fingers brushed the spot that made him feel sparks of pleasure igniting in his body.

This function of it, probably incidental, was very surprising. Who would have expected that a pleasure point would be located in such a place!

Approaching it methodically, he touched it for the first time, with curiosity discovering the structure and size, and had to admit that it actually worked as Sirius had said, every time he gently touched the spot he would shiver slightly and find it difficult to maintain an upright position. Finally deciding that he knew what he could find out, he carefully removed his fingers and washed his hands thoroughly. The inspection was over. He didn't repeat it again, nor did he bring himself to orgasm in this way, as he had no reason to, Sirius served its purpose, and Sirius was more than willing to give it to him.

Still, one day he would have to collect and examine the fluid he produced during orgasm, because even though he planned it, he never got around to it.

He was always too tired, weary and sleepy after a climax, never in the mood to explain to Sirius why he was collecting the liquid in a vial. But one day he will surely do it.

Severus knew the structure of the human body very well and his reason told him that there was no extra pocket in his body for this fluid. He was curious to know what exactly it was. Sperm, surely. Prostate fluid? Urine? That had been on his mind recently. But not yet, he wasn't going to shock Black that much. He was sure that he had never thought about it, for him fucking is fucking and that's the end of it.

Sex became one of Severus' body's needs just like sleeping or eating. He was not indebted to food for being able to eat it, he felt no attachment to the bed because he could regenerate in it. In the same way, he felt nothing for Sirius when he satisfied another need of his body, one that he himself had awakened in him. This was normal and expected, was it not?

He could eat and sleep anywhere, but he had sex only with Sirius, only he would give it to him, it would be inappropriate to seek it elsewhere, against Severus' moral code. But in his heart this person who was fucking him was not Sirius, it was simply a body and he was relieving his sexual

tension.

He guessed that it was the same for Sirius.

Yet, he supposed Sirius didn't sleep around with others either. It was their common thing, only their own, connecting them like the rings on each of their fingers. At least to Severus it was obvious; Sirius continued to be just as foolish.

Severus was a little surprised by his own boldness, but on the other hand, he had never been shy; being an introvert did not equate to a lack of confidence. Sometimes when they were eating breakfast, as they were now, Severus would notice Black staring at him. For a while then he would make a show of totally ignoring him and Sirius' eyes would go from grey to black as his pupils widened. It was like a ritual, a kind of flirting that Sirius clearly enjoyed a lot.

He didn't think it was about him, but more about what they were doing with each other, and that was fine. After finishing his meal, he rose from his seat, fully aware that his every move was being closely watched, and turned to face Black.

"I have a few minutes free before I leave." Severus met his gaze, and Black held his breath. "Do you want to fuck me?"

It wasn't the most elaborate or subtle invitation, but it was enough, because Black, who had only been waiting for it, leapt up from his seat and sprang at him and kissed him with desperation as if he was going to claim him whole. Severus returned the kisses with equal passion, letting him hold him down, feeling Sirius' hands immobilising him, pressing his whole body against him, so that Severus could feel his erection on his stomach. Sirius could certainly sense his too.

He really liked the power he had over Sirius, it was so easy. They had already done it in virtually every position and in almost every room. Sirius had him leaning against the table, lying on the table, lying on the floor, sitting on his lap front and back, leaning against the wall, lifted up, with his legs entwined around his waist and these were just times from the dining room.

When he had a moment to analyse the situation, he was ashamed of himself, he behaved like an animal in heat, but this awareness did not make him change his behaviour.

To his embarrassment Severus discovered that he also liked to land on his knees in front of Sirius and take him in his mouth. The feeling was strange, completely surprising, like nothing else. When he had it in his mouth it was as if something pulsed on his tongue, and as Sirius came with each spasm he could feel his cock getting harder and bouncing, and the ejaculate tasted salty.

If he had it in his throat, he could feel it choking him, but not so much that it bothered him. He liked the feeling, he didn't even mind that he was drooling a lot at the time.

The first time he did this he surprised himself and Black, he approached it with some uncertainty and apprehension, but judged that if Black was doing it then surely it wasn't that unpleasant, he certainly wasn't the type to sacrifice himself, and well, it wasn't. Yes, it was a bit of a shocking feeling at first but he soon got hooked and liked it.

Even more shocking was when Sirius turned him on all fours and ate out his ass. At first Severus wanted to start yelling at him and hex him, it seemed so unnatural and perverse to him but instead he decided to give it a chance, however strange it might be, because Sirius had proven he had experience and knew what he was doing. And it was a good choice, it turned out that his ass was super sensitive, and as Sirius worked it with his mouth, Severus came without any penetration so hard that he almost blacked out. After this experience, Severus learned not to question what Sirius was proposing in bed, and he never regretted it. He may not have been skilled in many other things but he was well versed in sex. Obviously. Why this did not surprise Severus?

Morning sex gave him a lot of energy to work on all day, and evening sex calmed him down and allowed him to use up any energy left in him. He undoubtedly slept better than ever afterwards. Usually Severus went back to his bedroom, but there were times when they did it more than once and he was too tired to get up right away and when he wanted to do it later, Sirius commented "stay" and threw his arm across him to emphasise that he meant it. So Severus stayed. He was always rewarded with morning sex even before breakfast.

This, as Severus very much enjoyed sex, further did not change his attitude towards Sirius. But Sirius' attitude had clearly changed and Severus didn't know what to think about it. Sirius tried to talk to him. Over breakfast, after sex, or, what had come up recently and what was happening more and more often - when he met him on his return from work.

Autumn was coming, the sunrises were getting later and later, the days were getting colder. Severus started to wear his cloak when he went to work or came home. Sometimes he was driven home by Mr. Seamus, with whom he enthusiastically discussed the progress of his next book. And so it was this time too. The horses came to a halt near Grimmauld Place, which was radiantly lit. Sirius was certainly at home, Severus assessed. Possibly looking out and seeing him now, in the carriage, along with his 'lover'. By sheer force of will, he refrained from rolling his eyes; he had no intention of telling Mr Seamus about the marital problems and Black's absurd ideas. Not wanting to provoke an unnecessary discussion with his husband he quickly said goodbye and jumped out of the carriage.

Sirius, as always dressed in Muggle clothes - black tight jeans and a t-shirt with "The Cure" written on it, lots of jewellery, chains, rings, bracelets, even an earring in his ear, with his long hair falling in waves on his shoulders, of course "accidentally" just happened to leave the living room and found himself in the hall. Who would have expected!

It had usually happened like this lately, and certainly when Severus had been brought in by Mr. Seamus.

"Severus." Sirius approached him just as Severus took off his cloak and handed it to Kreacher to refresh it. Before Severus had time to react, Sirius reached for his hand, lifted it and held it. "I see you are wearing the gloves you received from me."

Severus indifferently took his hand out of his hand, removed the gloves and handed them to Kreacher.

"Ohhh, ok then..." Black lowered his hand. "Are you in a bad mood?"

Severus slipped past him and moved deeper into the house, and Sirius followed.

"I'm in a normal mood."

He felt Black's hands closing around his waist and his hot breath on his neck, against his ear, and after a moment a kiss and a light bite on the lobe of his ear. He tilted his head and exposed more of his neck, signalling his consent to the caresses, his body immediately reacting as he felt the blood rush into his lower regions.

"I'd like to take you right here, on the couch." Sirius' breaths were moist, shuddering, his right hand moved slightly down and began to undo the buttons of his robe. At last he was speaking sense.

This Severus understood, it was the activity that brought them together, not the pretense that they cared about each other. Physical pleasure was the bonus they got out of this marriage of convenience, and that was all there was. Sex didn't change anything, it didn't fix their relationship, it was much easier to overcome the physical barrier than the psychological one.

"Yes." It was hard to judge whether it was an approval of the proposal or a reaction to it when Sirius' hand finally found its way and slid under his clothes. Maybe both at the same time, at least that was apparently Sirius' assessment.

Finally Sirius moved away, stood in front of Severus and, looking him straight in the eye, stripped naked, leaving only his jewellery. Long gone were the days when he avoided the sight of a naked Sirius, now he drank in his nakedness, never having enough of it. His figure was very shapely and

athletic, muscular and strong, the sight of it made Severus' knees go weak. A bit of black hair on his chest converged in a path leading down his belly to the soft fluffiness of his pubic hair. Severus' mouth went dry at the sight of his standing cock.

He let him undo all the buttons from his robe and took it off, so that he was left in just his panties. As Sirius crouched down to remove it, a moan escaped Severus' lips.

Sirius used a moistening spell on him, and Severus used a loosening the muscles locally one, he knew that Sirius did not mind preparing his body personally with his fingers, in fact he wanted it very much, but Severus was impatient that day.

His husband stopped, went to the couch, sat down.

"Ride me, Severus." His voice was low, slightly husky.

So Severus did it and was riding him like there was no tomorrow, his long hair was rising and falling with every movement he made, the reluctance he still had at the beginning of the year long forgotten, his moans and meows filled the silence.

This caused Sirius to smirk a delirious smile, then held him tight as his thrusts became harder, until Severus began to shake and squirt cum on Sirius' chest, and then inertly fell on him with his whole weight and let him lift him when he Sirius fucked him for a while longer as he chased his own orgasm, pressing Severus hard against his chest and held him immobilised until he finished. Only then did he gently release him, let him get off his laps and half lie down and half sit beside him on the sofa. Severus collapsed in his arms, exhausted, satiated, not even aware that he had a dreamy smile on his face.

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When their breaths finally calmed Sirius ran his hand over Severus's flat stomach, smearing his cum, before cleansing them both with a spell. He must have liked doing it, because he repeated it often, which Severus noticed. It didn't bother him, he was indifferent to it, let him do it if he liked it that way. Severus lazily reached for his robe and threw it on, spell-binding the buttons, then looked at Sirius, who was in no hurry to dress, and also dressed him with a spell, he did not want any of the House Elves to see them like this. On the other hand, he was sure they had probably already been seen and now the Elves were prudently avoiding them when not summoned.

Sirius smirked at Severus' action and continued to lie stretched out, with his legs spread wide. "Does Mr. Seamus know about how much you enjoy what we do?" He leaned over the bed, reached into his jeans and pulled out a packet of cigarettes, and put one of them in his mouth and lit it with the lighter he had in the packet. He inhaled and let the smoke out of his mouth with a satisfied expression. It was so very Muggle.

The stench of the cigarette spread around the room and Severus wrinkled his nose as it reached him. He husband rolled his eyes. There was that subject again. "Seriously...?"

Sirius reached a hand into Severus' dishevelled hair, and began to play with a strand of it.

Fortunately, he did not use the hand in which he had a cigarette to do so, because Severus would have had to slap him.

But still, Severus twitched. Don't touch my oily hair, he wanted to shout sarcastically and hit him on the hand, you'll get dirty. He didn't like Sirius behaving like that, so he stepped back slightly and brushed back his hair, combing his fingers through it, leaving Sirius empty-handed, then stood up. Sirius gripped his wrist. "Don't go."

This thing again, feigned affection, and again he touched him non-sexually and wanted to talk. Severus furrowed his brow and slid his hand out of his palm.

"I want to change and bathe."

Sirius rose from his seat. "May I come with you?"

Severus would have preferred him not to go, but Sirius had already moved, magically put out his cigarette and threw it on his clothes lying on the floor, grabbed his hand again, this time by the palm, intertwining his fingers with his own, and set off running up the stairs, forcing him to lift his robe slightly with his other hand so as not to trip over it.

There goes that familiarity again. He'll have to talk to Sirius about this, that's for sure, he mused, while running after him.

He didn't, however, because Sirius, instead of giving him privacy, went into the bathroom with him and had him again, in the shower. Not that Severus minded. It was unbelievable how easily he gave in to lust and pleasure after he'd already realised he liked it. Even his strict, austere mind, focused only on the important things, was becoming clouded by a haze of lust.

When he finally managed to bathe, as Sirius did too, he lay down on his stomach on the bed, exhausted. Sirius, instead of getting dressed and leaving sat down next to him.

"Didn't you mind the situation? For me it was awful." His hand stroked Severus' damp hair, reaching halfway down his back and then the small of his back. Tenderly, without sexual subtext. Huh. Severus felt like hiding his face in a pillow.

He didn't want to know what Sirius hated and what he liked. He did not want to know anything about him. The less they knew about each other the better. But of course he guessed what he was talking about, it was hard not to, given the context.

"No, why? Yes, it was unpleasant but it was a necessity, and that was that."

He have learnt to accept the unbearable reality and live in it, otherwise he would have gone mad, he thought but not said it out loud, instead Severus closed his eyes, crossed his arms in front of him and rested his cheek against his forearm.

Years of being tormented by Sirius and James came in handy. Perhaps he should thank them for that, he judged ironically.

He felt uncomfortable when Sirius touched him, he didn't know what to expect. This unexpected friendliness was very foreign, it did not suit Sirius. Already more obvious and natural were his physical attacks.

Sirius sighed heavily, not pausing to play with his hair. "I envy you. I wasn't mentally fit anymore, I hated conforming to stupid rules, being treated like a breeding bull. I hated other things too..."

Severus wasn't sure why Sirius wanted to confide in him. Why wasn't he telling his friends? Of course he understood that it was hard, but it was a matter of attitude. Not everything we do makes us happy, some things just have to be done and that's it.

"Ummm? Why did you stop? Just say what you hated about our duties, you want to do it. Me? Is that why you stopped and didn't finish? Have you gone so soft, Black, that you can't say it to my face? After all, it wasn't so long ago that you were doing it!"

The position they were in was intimate, too intimate for Severus, he didn't want to have this conversation lying naked on the bed, and when his body was powerless, all the muscles relaxed, almost out of control. He knew no reason to pretend to be polite, he was not going to play the games Black wanted to play.

Sirius's hand stilled. "That 'recently' was like 4 years ago, Severus. You may not believe me, but I've grown up since then, I'm not so stupid and reckless anymore." Sirius hesitated, gathering his thoughts.

Severus rolled his eyes when he heard this, usually people who really are what they claim to be don't need to convince anyone of this. Sirius fortunately didn't notice this because he couldn't so he continued his thought.

"It wasn't about you, it was more about your attitude towards it. About calling it 'duty', about you reacting so badly.... I felt like I was raping you every time, it was horrible." He shook his head and hid his face in his hands for a moment. "I used spell to finish, you know?"

So there was a spell for it? Severus had never heard of it! Probably it was in the handbooks of a very different order from those which he had read. Well, if he had known it earlier, perhaps he would have done what Sirius wanted of him then. On the other hand, he felt too much psychological aversion to want to expose himself to this.

Severus lifted his face from over his shoulder and looked at him sideways.

"Yes, I understand. Instead of being dramatic you should have known it wasn't rape, I came to you myself as agreed, it was simply a necessity." This guy can complicate everything, probably living ten lives at once in his head.

Sirius snapped up and waved his hands in frustration.

"That's what I'm talking about, necessity. A NECESSITY!!! And it could have just been a pleasure, something that wouldn't have made it so disgusting, so repulsive." He looked at him with his face slightly contorted in an expression of frustration, with his eyebrows drawn together, his grey eyes wandering over Severus' face, searching for something.

Severus rose and sat back on his heels to at least level off a little. "What do you want from me? I

didn't know it could be any different, okay? I guess it doesn't surprise you that I didn't feel like obeying orders from someone who was trying to kill me!"

There was no point in mentioning the attempted rape, he had worked that out long ago. He knew that, unlike trying to kill him, this was the result of drunken urges and adrenaline, not something Sirius really wanted. Still repulsive, that's for sure, but the question of intentionality of behaviour made a big difference to Severus. He didn't want to rape him; he wanted to kill him. A great improvement!

His rage was growing, he could feel his face turning red as he shouted at Sirius. Had he had enough of that already, or was Black really so stupid as not to understand? Did he really think they were in the same position in this marriage? He didn't understand what this was to Severus, how much he fought himself not to explode when he saw that thoughtless, complacent face every day? How did it feel for him to live in his house and eat his food?

To coexist with a person so incredibly difficult to get along with, explosive and aggressive, as Severus has seen so many times first-hand? And he would listen to him just like that?

"Gosh, Severus, I'm sorry, I'm really, really sorry, I bloody regret it." Black hid his head in his hands, his fingers entwined in his long hair as he shook it as if protesting.

"That's fine." Severus shrugged his shoulders, he did not believe in the sincerity of these words anyway. "I don't know what changed to make you 'grow up' so suddenly, but don't expect me to forget everything because sex is good." Maybe for Sirius that much was enough, but not for him.

"I don't expect it." Sirius shook his hair again and looked over at Severus.

He shuffled over to him and sat down next to him again. "What do you think, can you try to get to know me again, as I am now and not as I was before? Would you give it a chance?"

It took a lot of courage to ask that question, of that Severus was sure. But Sirius was a Gryffindor, so it wasn't surprising. But it was an unnecessary waste of energy. Maybe if Sirius had said it ten years ago Severus would have agreed, but now?

"What's the matter, Black, James and Lily have no time for you?"

A wry smirk appeared on Gryffindor's lips. "Severus, as cynical as ever..." Sirius only sighed, but did not pick up on the taunt. He seemed weary rather than angry.

"If you really want to know then all is well with them, we see each other often, I also play with little Harry often. He's a lovely kid, you should meet him." He grinned at Severus. "Back on topic... You know, we're both adults now, we've changed, at least I have. We could try to get to know each other, discover each other, maybe we could like each other, maybe we have more in common than we might seem at first glance."

Oh, surely, judged Severus with irony, they could not be more different. Unbelievable to what extent Sirius deceives himself. "But why?"

Sirius looked at him with an uncharacteristic seriousness. "Wouldn't you rather have a good relationship with me? A marriage would be much more comfortable."

Severus just looked at him and shrugged his shoulders. If he was to be honest he didn't need to have any relationship with Sirius outside of bed.

Sirius understood the unspoken. "You will never forgive me?"

Severus had to restrain himself not to roll his eyes again. This guy just had that effect on him. "What does it matter?"

"I would like to get to know you as a person.... Do you never want to change anything? Are you not interested in me as a person at all?"

Was he interested in him as a person?! A greater absurd he had not heard, and that was evidence of something considering the things Sirius usually said. Severus looked at him critically. "I'll tell you how I see it. Sex is good, so you treat me differently. Maybe like a girl? I don't know, different in any case. That's point one: sex." Severus flexed one of his toes to emphasise what he was saying, and then another. "And point two: you got interested in me in some way because Mr. Seamus turned up. I don't know if it was out of boredom or for fun, but since then you've been provoking brawls with me and fights. Ah no, right, past tense, since sex is good you don't physically attack me anymore, after all I'm a...girl now?" Severus nodded to himself. "So point two: some strange form of jealousy? " He tilted his head. "It's not like that, Black? Can you deny it? Why this sudden interest in me?"

Sirius sat staring ahead for a moment, finally turning to Severus with what looked like a shadow of a sad smile. "I would simply like to have a good relationship with you..." At the same time he looked so sad and serious that if Severus did not know him he would have been fooled. "We hardly ever talk to each other.... You shut down whenever I try to get to know you, to find out something about you. I only know what you say in interviews or what your body reveals even though your mouth is silent."

Severus closed his eyes. Years of therapy had helped him a lot, but they couldn't prepare him for everything; sometimes he still stumbled, as Sirius had just pointed out to him. Yes, he learnt not to fall apart mentally every time he was triggered but this did not change his personality, he was still himself. No matter how many times the psychotherapist gently suggested he express his emotions more, talk about what he was feeling and show what he didn't like, it was all incompatible with his personality, he would feel stupid and not natural and not himself if he did that. No, he couldn't and wouldn't, always and everywhere he had to pretend. So he ended up with his body showing more of his feelings than he planned to do. Damn it.

And Sirius wants to get to know him, wants conversation and honesty from him!

Severus shook his head, this conversation was absurd. Finally he began to laugh, the whole thing seemed like some delirious dream. Black apologising to him again but this time sounding like he meant it, Black wanting to get to know him.... "Ok, how do you see it?"

Sirius stretched towards Severus and propped himself up with an arm on the mattress. He looked at him slightly surprised by his laughter, clearly not understanding what was going on. "Hmmm... Maybe we could go somewhere together? To the cinema, to the park, to ride a motorbike, or even to a bookshop or library. Then we could grab some dinner."

If Severus had not had much control over himself, he would probably have sat with his mouth open upon hearing these revelations. If he understood correctly, and he thought he did, then Sirius had just offered him a date!

Severus felt like bursting out laughing again, he was beginning to feel the hysteria overtaking him. Just a moment more and he would start laughing and crying at the same time. It was too much, he did not expect it.

A date. With Snivellus, an ugly guy with a big nose and oily hair. With someone contemptible, someone Sirius had hated for so many years, hated to the point of wanting to kill him. An outcast with whom only the people of his House stuck with, but not close enough for them to care that he was being tormented. And now he wants to go on a date with him. Restrained tears began to pinch his eyes, he didn't know how much longer he could manage to pretend to be composed. He felt his body start to tremble slightly. This was not good, definitely.

He swallowed his saliva and manged "Leave me now" in an almost normal sounding voice. Only

slightly shaky, only slightly too high-pitched. He almost made it.

Sirius looked at him with wide-open grey eyes and nodded, with a wand motion he dressed and left without a word. Apparently Severus looked less mentally stable than he expected himself to look. Damn it! He'll worry about it later, now he wasn't able to.

As soon as the door closed behind Sirius, big tears began to drip down his cheeks and sobs took his breath away, making his throat hurt. With his face contorted from crying, he reached for his wand. "Sectumsemptra!"

Red thin lines appeared on his forearms and slowly opened, letting out trickles of blood. It had been so long since he'd done that, managed to calm the pain for so long, lulling his mind with studying, learning, writing books. Pretending to be someone else. Severus who has succeeded and whom nothing can touch.

And now it all suddenly fell away like a veil separating him from the truth. He had become a pathetic, snotty, despairing Snivellus again, not understanding why everyone hated him. He cried and cried, his whole body was shaken with spasms, he howled and wailed, staining the bedclothes with blood, every now and then cutting in a new place.

A fresh start. As if there was some point they could return to, as if Severus' whole life up to that point didn't count, didn't matter, was irrelevant. The years of tormenting him, of bullying him, of destroying his mental health, his self-esteem, of depriving him of the only place in his childhood where he could feel safe.

All this was to be erased, deleted, he was to forget it. Let go, move on, and so on. You don't count, what you feel doesn't matter. It wasn't that bad (for Sirius), it didn't last that long (for Sirius), it was fun sometimes (for Sirius), you initiated it yourself sometimes (with your existence), you weren't blameless (you existed). We were then children, boys will be boys, the mistakes of youth. And it's all been rectified now, why do you continue to think about it. Come on, get over it, let's start again. Stupid petty Severus, so childish, all the time clinging to his childhood pains. Grow up, think like a serious man, will you?

When the rage attack finally passed, Severus stopped the bleeding and lay on the bed panting and gasping, his body trembling with exertion, weakened from blood loss, weary and with a headache from crying. As he supposed to, he was all swollen up. Well, he wasn't going to show himself to anyone now anyway. If he had been five years younger he would probably now be thinking about using Sectumsemptra on his neck, as he often fantasised in the past, but now he was no longer a child, his life had meaning.

Tomorrow, when his storm would surely cease, he decided to salvage what was left of his dignity. But that's only tomorrow, today he can afford to let himself fall apart to the end. When the morning came and he had to go to breakfast, he would pick up the pieces of himself that could be picked up and glue them together, but today he had no strength to pretend.

Severus knew he had Blood-Replenishing Potion in his trunk, it would help him regain his strength. The scars would be hidden by Beauty spell, just like the others. No one will know that he was ever anything other than in his best form.

He was never going to tell anyone about his despair and sense of hurt. Neither to the Malfoys nor to Mr. Seamus. When he didn't talk about them it was as if his problems didn't exist.

Everyone avoids people with depression, talking about his mental problems makes any group of friends fall apart, let alone co-workers or distant acquaintances who fall silent in displeasure, waiting for the unpleasant subject to air like a public fart.

This is what his mother taught him and here she was right.

He decided to accept Black's proposal, they would get to know each other anew, he had no choice. Now that it was said, there was no going back to the recent neutral behaviour, once Sirius thought of something he would not relent until he obtained it. He did not like not getting his toys. Severus feared that if he refused, out of spite, having little to lose himself Sirius might try to harm his career.

He couldn't show how much it moved him, how much in his heart he was still that hurt, lonely boy, and if he turned it down, Black would understand and would have seen the truth.

He needed to feel less and think more, nothing good ever comes from feelings. And certainly from showing feelings. It makes you weak, gives your enemies a weapon against you. No one will sympathise with defeats, but everyone will rejoice. Concentrate, Severus, it is essential and necessary. It's not that difficult, just get rid of yourself and become a new person.

Part three 1983.04 Severus

Chapter Notes

Starting from this chapter there will be alternating POVs of Severus and Sirius.

'Is this really necessary?' A weary Severus pointed with his hand to the motorbike parked in front of 12 Grimmauld Place. Time was running, he should soon be at the meeting place, and instead he stood with Sirius and looked at the machine. Since they had "mended" their relationship Sirius insisted on accompanying Severus to scientific symposiums and meetings with readers. This has been going on for years.

He in return was taken, thankfully not often, on pub outings with Sirius' work colleagues who approached Severus with polite curiosity.

Severus' career flourished, whether he wanted it or not, he became a scientific celebrity and his photos appeared from time to time not only in scientific journals but even in The Daily Prophet.

It had been a few years since Sirius' family had predictably seen pictures of Severus in the newspapers, so they suddenly began to approach him with more cordiality, if that word could be used in their case, and with even more pity for Sirius, who was such a failed child that it was his husband who had the career and not him. Even when they finally found out he was an Auror it didn't help much anyway. He was such an ordinary Auror, he did not have any publicity, so the prestige was average.

Severus, on the other hand, was a sensation in the academic world. All the magic schools, private universities, science centres and big bookstores had to invite Severus to speak, and they had to go to great lengths to do so, because Severus refused whenever he could, still hating all the fuss about him. His purpose was academic, not to become a celebrity and mascot of the scientific community.

His parents also found out about it, of course, and his mother wanted him to visit them at home, but Severus ignored the invitation and did not even mention it to his spouse, who was not included in the invitation. This clearly showed that Severus was still not accepted there, only that apparently his parents hoped to gain something by renewing contact with him. Maybe it was about money? Severus didn't know and wasn't going to find out. His psyche could only take a certain amount of blows and he did not want to test how far he was from the limit.

He needed peace of mind and that is what he was striving for.

After a series of refusals, even at Hogwarts (Severus never wanted to set foot there again), this time he was unlucky and, unable to refuse once again, so accepted the invitation. All the more so, because Mr. Seamus asked him to do so.

He himself felt tired of it before it even started, so he could not understand Sirius' eagerness to go there personally without having to do so, but he did.

Sirius had an answer for everything. "It would look strange, as if you were ashamed of me or as if you were unmarried. My presence will curb all rumours." He argued, but Severus was not entirely convinced.

And this flying motorbike...This was giving Severus a migraine. Severus didn't fancy this

suggestion from Sirius, but Sirius was clearly not taking 'no' for an answer.

His husband was now pointing at the motorbike with one hand, the other holding a cigarette and wasting Severus' time.

"Come on, it's the same mode of transport as the others, only nicer, get used to it. Besides, you've flown on it before." This last bit was undoubtedly true and, among other reasons, a reason why Severus did not want to fly on it. As before, he was dressed in a robe and still before his eyes he had the sight of his naked legs uncovered by the rush of wind up to thigh high. He definitely did not want to show up there like this.

He sighed heavily and shook his head in exasperation but Sirius only laughed. "Come on, Severus! If you like you can sit at the front or the side." Then he inhaled a cigarette, the smoke of which enveloped Snape, making him even more reluctant.

Sirius was an amalgamation of all those qualities that repelled Severus; not only did he drink a lot of alcohol, but he also smoked cigarettes. Severus hated it, associating it with his father. Of course, he would sooner die than tell Sirius about it, so he remained to cast disgusted glances in his direction.

He didn't want to provoke a fight, he didn't have time for that. Sirius effectively used up all for this teasing. He tried to be "friendly", as Severus judged.

He shouldn't care, but Black exposed himself to him, showed his vulnerability, and tried to prove he was mature, and Severus didn't want to come off worse.

Not a day went by that Severus didn't regret agreeing to mend their relationship. Earlier, they had seen each other less often and somehow it had worked. Now nothing was going as it should.

Reconciliation did not come easily, and when, stressed by constantly keeping his guard up, Severus sleeplessly lay awake at night, he repeatedly felt like breaking it off and going back to previous relationships.

Learning to reacquaint himself with Sirius was difficult for him, and in the early days of building their new relationship he felt strained and threatened when they stayed too long in each other's company.

Often, because he had to keep himself under control at all times, he felt emotionally frozen, as if he had been put into a catatonic state. He saw, heard, spoke but did not feel. The open wound had healed, all that remained was the numbness, the unfeeling scar tissue of his soul.

All of Sirius' desperate pushy emotionality didn't make it any better either, it was heavy, overwhelming, coating him like wet laundry, Severus felt stunned and overwhelmed, like he couldn't breathe with him and Sirius' constant presence around Severus made him furious and stressed. He had to concentrate all the time, watch his words, he felt as if he was moving through quicksand.

And Sirius didn't make it any easier, that's for sure.

He continually heard "Sev, I really regret the way I treated you, I'm bloody ashamed of it." What did he have to say to that? "And rightly so, as you should?"

Obviously he didn't do it.

Sirius was always fawning over him and trying to guess his wishes, jumping around him like a dog. He asked him a multitude of questions about things ranging from the most trivial to the very serious and Severus had to think about the question every now and then in order not to say something just to shut it up, because he knew that Sirius would certainly come back to this answer and refer to it.

This made him feel like he was under constant surveillance and could never be relaxed. Sirius clung to Severus like ivy, always trying to touch him, kiss him, talk to him and take him out, the last of which Severus never agreed to. Enough was enough.

Severus didn't know if it was a nervous breakdown that caused Sirius to behave in this way, with this sick desperation, or if he was doing it out of boredom, or if Severus served as a curious toy until he was inspected inside and out, and then, spoiled by this inspection, he would be thrown away. Neither perspective suited him, but while he expected the latter, the former frightened him more. Severus may have feared and distrusted him, but he could not deliberately psychologically torment him, especially if Sirius was now at his worst, so he tried his best to conform to his expectations and allowed these inspections.

What's worse, Sirius wanted him to meet James and Lily. Already the out-of-bed interactions with Sirius were mentally exhausting for him, and talking to Potters was even more difficult. Severus felt bad in their company, uncomfortable, awkward. He was suspicious, expecting trickery. He didn't like talking to James, he had nothing in common with the man who liked to talk about sport, and he resented Lily.

Every time he wanted to avoid a meeting, Sirius would whine to him, come into his shop or bedroom and talk, talk, and talk.

So Severus agreed and was going there, usually kept quiet and switched off his thoughts, waiting for the meeting to be over, sitting steadfastly, glancing at Black from time to time to assess whether it was enough. Severus supposed that the Potters were as much delighted with Sirius' idea as he was, but he must have kept them talking for so long that for the sake of peace they agreed. And so every week.

These forced meetings in no way warmed their relationship.

Sirius clearly did not care or did not notice the failure in this matter.

It troubled Severus more than monthly check-ups which are to be for the first five years of marriage. This was the last year of this kind of frequent checking, after which visits will be once every six months for the second five years. Oh, how he looked forward to when those ten years would pass and he would get his life back.

He was slowly preparing for this. Thanks to the fact that he was earning more and more, he was able to start putting money away, and he assumed that by the time of the divorce he would have managed to accumulate enough money to move to another part of the cities and live, still working, a reasonably comfortable life, which he could not even dream of before.

If his relationship with Sirius does not deteriorate drastically during these coming years, Severus could even be in touch with him even after the divorce. They could also continue to sleep together. And who knows, maybe one day he'll even meet someone who will fall in love with him?

Severus twitched, suddenly feeling an arm embracing him in the middle.

"Hey, where have you drifted off to?" Sirius' lips touched his ear and Severus had to restrain himself not to jerk away. Instead, he tried to move this arm away from his waist.

"Don't."

Sirius laughed and clasped his arm tighter around him.

"Hmmm? What 'don't'?" Don't you want us to go there? Don't you want me to touch you?" His lips slid down to Severus' neck and began to caress it.

It wasn't unpleasant but Severus rolled his eyes anyway. "It's the other one. I don't have time."

He groaned slightly when he felt his lips and his husband's teeth tighten gently against his skin. He would have to mask the hickey with a beauty spell before he showed himself in front of people.

Severus tried to turn to face Sirius and he let him and immediately when they were face to face he bent his head and kissed him, his other hand still holding the cigarette.

This was not in Severus' plans. Nevertheless, he closed his eyes and parted his lips to let his tongue inside. He enjoyed the kiss, despite the fact that it was Sirius and he tasted like cigarette. He had been his first everything but love, for that Severus had not yet experienced, and when he finally opened himself to sensation he was surprised to realise that he was a very sensual person, very fond of any kind of erotic touch, reacting to it very intensely.

After a few moments of kissing, finally Severus pulled away, with reddened, moist lips, and raised his gaze to look Sirius in the eye. "I cannot ride a motorbike."

Sirius, looking as pleased with himself as ever, raised his eyebrows questioningly. "Why?"

He will never change, Severus judged; he will always be that arrogant conceit.

"The wind turns my robe up." He blushed slightly with embarrassment and anger that he had to say such things.

"Oh, is that all?" Sirius pulled out a wand and, in one motion, transformed Severus' clothes into black skinny jeans and a black, loose-fitting hoodie. "Now you should be fine! Problem solved, you'll thank me later!" He stepped back an arm's length, walked around him and looked after the enraged Severus from top to bottom. "Oh wow, what a body you have! You look like Patti! You should go out like that more often!"

Severus gasped in shock, blushed even harder and stood there with his mouth stupidly parted. He forcefully had to restrain himself from asking who Patti was, but he didn't want Black to mock him. All right, well, so he looked like Patti. Severus would not ask about her, even if his life depended on it!

With a wide grin Sirius sat on the motorbike making room for him behind him. "Hurry up, or you'll be late." And to indicate that he was not joking he started the engine with an ear teasing "brummm, brummm."

With teeth clenched in exasperation, Severus sat behind Sirius, and they set off.

Patti, Patti... Severus was irritated at the thought. Damn Sirius. Why did he mention any of his exes now?

If he expected Severus to be jealous, he was mistaken, but there was no denying that the subject made Severus curious. But, he would not think of nonsense now, after all, he was on his way to work.

Fuck you and fuck that Patti, Severus sent Sirius wishes in his thoughts.

As they set off a strong breeze swept over him, so he hid more behind Sirius' back, hugged him tighter by the waist and rested his face against his back, pressing his cheek against the thick leather of his jacket and sunk into his thoughts.

Signing books and meeting readers was not Severus' favourite activity, but it was necessary, so he didn't complain, he just did it.

It was boring, it required contact and conversation with many strangers, accepting sincere and not sincere compliments, making friends, and he wasn't fond of all that. He much preferred to work in the privacy of his laboratory on new spells or recipes for potions.

Recently, he had managed to buy a medieval manuscript with old spells and recipes for potions

translated from Egyptian ancient wizard scrolls, and Severus kept working on it, trying to decipher the old Latin and test the knowledge gained. It was risky because it was a translation of a translation. He hoped that the medieval scribe knew his profession and did not make mistakes during transcription. In any case, such a possibility did not stop Severus, on the contrary, he felt the excitement in every cell of his body when he managed to translate another word and he was getting closer and closer to his goal. If there were errors and something did not work, he would try to improve the recipe, as he always did.

When he held the book in his hands for the first time his attention was caught by the beauty of it. The embossed title on the leather cover glinted faintly in the candlelight, the words 'Potions of the Ancients' gleaming in delicate gold paint.

Ancients... The times when the book he held in his hands was printed had also become a distant past.

As Severus opened the book, a breath of stale air swept into the room, bringing with it the scent of bygone eras and old parchment. His pale fingers gently flipped the pages of a medieval manuscript on potions, its crusty old pages crackling warningly, reminding him of their age. Of course, they were reinforced with a preservative spell, but they still had to be handled gently.

Severus ran his fingers gently over the brittle, yellowed parchment, admiring the artistry of the hand-drawn images. Around the first letter on each page, delicate illustrations adorned the text. Vibrant colours seeped into the parchment, depicting scenes of plants, cauldrons and mystical creatures, while delicate flowers and intricate designs decorated the margins. Severus' eyes traced the lines, his mind conjuring up visions of the potions described in it, their potential power and intricacies. It was as if the manuscript itself had come to life, whispering its secrets to the solitary scholar. He wondered about the nameless scribe, probably a monk, who painstakingly scribbled down the pages, contemplating how many sleepless nights and ink-stained fingers it had taken him to create this masterpiece. Did he try out these potions, did he dream of doing so, or was he merely dispassionately translating and writing down what he was told to do? It was so easy for him to sink into his dreams when he thought about this book.

The table of contents sounded very promising and made his heart beat faster. He translated the names on the fly during the reading.

Severus's eyes lingered on the last potion, "Potionem Nocturnam." Night vision potions were a rare find, which could be useful in many situations. His thoughts raced, imagining the possibilities of adding such a potion to his arsenal.

He began translating the first recipe, his mind effortlessly switching between Latin and English. Severus could picture the ingredients vividly, recognizing the Latin terms for the rare plants that would grant the potion its unique properties.

Severus had already managed to bring in several of the ingredients mentioned in the recipe, which he had never encountered before. The world of magic was so big, so many things were yet to be discovered and tried! The ancient recipes of the wizards from Siberia and Tibet, Native American and Israel, from Greece, from the ancient Mesopotamia, from China and from the Slavic countries. All these possibilities made him dizzy with delight.

Almost as much time as for inventing spells and improving potions Severus spent on searching for old books and notes, conversations with various libraries, and with international magical schools of the same type as Hogwarts, as well as he established correspondence with representatives of most of the old Wizarding families (For Black's part, he had help from Narcissa; he didn't tell Sirius anything. Of course, he went through the huge library at Grimmauld Place very carefully and found a few items of interest, which of course he did not tell his husband about either), visited

Wizard and Muggle antique shops, flea markets, museums, checked all possibilities and rumours. He spent most of his money generously on buying whatever he could find of the items he was interested in.

He is now almost finished with the translation of the first potion recipe, with only a few lines left, and will be able to start his experiments. If it wasn't for this meeting with the readers, he would have been able to get on with it this evening, but unfortunately there is a dinner planned afterwards with people from the community he "absolutely had to meet." Well, he had to be patient. In any case, he will get on with it soon.

Immersed in pleasant thoughts, he did not even notice when they arrived at their destination. He was snapped out of his daydreaming by the voice of Mr. Seamus.

"Isn't that Severus? Hello, boy! And your husband, Sirius Black! Hello, hello!" Sirius and Mr. Seamus had met before, as this was not the first time his husband had insisted on accompanying him.

The older man shook hands with them both in turn and Severus realised with horror what he was wearing. He looked at the broad grin on Sirius' face and didn't hit him just because he didn't want to do it in front of Mr. Seamus.

"Nice to meet you again, Mr. Seamus." He answered the greeting with a smile and as soon as the man turned his head for a moment Severus immediately changed out of his jeans and hoodie into a robe. Instantly better! Sirius still looked like a Muggle, in his black leather jacket, jeans and combat boots but there was nothing Severus could do about it. He, unlike his husband, respected his integrity and choices.

The meeting was held in an old church converted into a library. Severus loved the coloured light streaming in through the stained glass windows and painting patterns on the stone floor and red brick wall. The whole building had a very atmospheric feel to it, Severus felt as if he had been transported several hundred years back in time. He was out of time.

During the conversation with the readers, Sirius sat in the front row, next to Mr. Seamus and looked at him proudly, significantly glancing at the others, so that surely no one missed the fact that they had come together and were married. It was so childish....

Not letting it affect his mood he answered questions in an unemotional, matter-of-fact tone, giving comprehensive answers, sometimes explaining what the questioner had done wrong that his spell or potion had failed. He felt like a university lecturer or a Hogwarts teacher. After half an hour of this conversation, he felt completely exhausted mentally. He would never want to work like that.

When the two hours of the meeting had finally passed Severus felt as exhausted as if a week had passed since it had started. These questions... Some intelligent, but most of them stupid or tricky, as if the questioner hoped to catch him in a lie and expose a great mystification. Severus's very young age sometimes caused consternation among publishers and sponsors, so it didn't seem to faze him that readers also approached him with caution.

Fortunately, this will pass on its own, he consoled himself in his mind.

As soon as Severus rose from his chair Sirius was immediately at his side, apparently planning to act out in front of Mr. Seamus a play entitled "A happy marriage of love." Of course he was right to do so, reluctantly Severus had to admit, it would be dangerous for anyone to find out about the nature of their relationship, even Mr. Seamus. The fewer people who know, the better. Every so often an article would make the front page of The Daily Prophet about some couple of unfortunate souls who had been proven to have forged a marriage that had obviously been annulled, and who

had lost their magic because of it. A fucking regime, as Sirius so beautifully called it, and altogether such was the truth. What happened and how it happened - nobody knows, but the fact was that the Ministry ruled with a firm hand. A totalitarian state, Sirius grumbled, and Severus could only nod in agreement.

When Sirius put one arm around his waist and the other affectionately stroked his shoulder, Severus allowed it and did not move away. He couldn't play the way Black did, but he tried.

"Would you like a drink?" Sirius let go of his arm and, unbeknownst to him, he suddenly had a bottle of water in his hand. "I think that might have dehydrated you."

Out of the corner of his eye, Severus noticed a slight smile of satisfaction on Mr. Seamus' face. He probably took it as a sign of concern. Very well, let him think so.

"Thank you." He tried to bring something like a shadow of a smile to his face and accepted the water.

Over dinner with influential people, Severus noticed curious glances cast in the direction of the infamous Black family heir but ignored it. A bunch of buffoons as he privately called onlookers. Sirius himself wanted to attend such meetings so he clearly didn't mind. He himself spoke to Sirius neither more often nor less frequently than usual, when it was just the two of them.

When Severus had finally met and talked to everyone Mr. Seamus deemed necessary and dinner was over, Severus set off in the direction of the bedroom assigned to him and Sirius, located in a building connected to the church. It was too late to make the long journey home on the motorbike, plus Sirius had been drinking alcohol so Severus would not agree to fly with him and without the motorbike Sirius would not agree to return.

Severus did not need any public arguments so he agreed to the offered accommodation.

They were walking down a long corridor lined with black and white tiles, Severus' ears still ringing with fragments of the conversations they had had at the table when suddenly he caught his reflection in the mirror he was passing and his eyes widened in surprise, he raised his hand and touched it to the spot where his husband had kissed him earlier. The hickey on his neck contrasted greatly with the whiteness of his skin.

He stared at it in disbelief until he finally shifted his eyes higher until he and Sirius met each other's gazes in the mirror's reflection, the grey eyes looked on with amusement and barely concealed satisfaction, the black eyes were narrowed in irritation.

Severus pulled his eyebrows together angrily and moved swiftly behind the house Elf towards their bedroom door, and Sirius, who had noticed his behaviour, snorted with laughter.

1983.04 Sirius

Visits to a psychiatrist helped with his depression, and now he only went there occasionally like once or twice per year, but the older Sirius got the more lonely he felt.

Walking around this empty house, with this reluctant almost ghost he had for a spouse, only made things worse.

Sirius didn't know how long he could take it and live like that, outside of society.

He was a disappointment to everyone, no one needed him, no one cared about him, only three people really liked him. Many more approached him with dislike.

He felt like he was in prison, his frustration growing.

It was in a prison he had made himself, the key, he supposed, was held by Severus. As long as there was a key, of course.

Eventually Sirius stopped going to psychotherapy because he realised that it could not help him.

The psychotherapist could only teach him how to accept this imprisonment, not how to escape from it. And he didn't want that, he wanted a change, he didn't want to love his cell and consider it the pinnacle of his dreams. He would suffocate in his four walls, he needed human contact so much that sometimes he was so desperate that he almost ran out into the street and talked to strangers.

Instead, he would drink, almost to the point of unconsciousness, in order to escape this nightmare, or he would get on a motorbike, or sometimes both at the same time, and fly wherever his eyes would carry him, sometimes for a whole day, returning only in the middle of the night, because what did it matter, no one was waiting for him anyway. Severus would not even notice if he died.

Sure, he hung out with James and Lily, and with Peter but they were all busy with their children and their lives. At the end of the day they would go back to their place and he would be left alone. Slowly Sirius got used to the knowledge that his appearance and social position would not help him to get it. If only he could get to know others, make more friends! But this was not for him either.

Yes, he needed physical activity, mental stimulation, lots of laughter and conversations over wine.

Not with his family, of course; it unquestionably gave him a rush of adrenaline, but it wasn't the kind of company he needed. Sirius didn't understand how people with such cranky, whiny and nagging personalities as Orion and Walpurga had could get together. He probably would not have been able to stand himself if he had been in the place of either of them, let alone endure the company of the other Black. Yes, they were definitely dropping out as entertainment.

Of course, he knew that he had inherited some of their faults.

Although he tried to work on himself, it was difficult for him to stop his temper tantrums, which overrode his reason, of which he was later ashamed and which made his social situation even worse. His temperament nevertheless found a way to win over his will.

He had the feeling that all attempts to talk, to establish normal relationships were deliberately sabotaged by Severus and then despair and frustration took over and he lost control of himself.

In any case, loneliness did not serve him well. His energetic personality needed some outlet, otherwise he would have become even more depressed and an alcoholic. Sometimes he was really frightened because the alcohol he used to mask the pain slowly stopped working and then he was left alone with himself and his feelings and thoughts. So he drank more, but it was like painting over dirt, at first sight it seemed normal, but a drop of water was enough to wash away the facade and show what was hidden. And it wasn't a pretty sight.

Every now and then he would consider giving up on himself, there was basically nothing left for him anyway, he had lost his life, but his will to live always held him back. Completely unnecessary in his circumstances.

The Auror's job offered some respite, he met people, talked about all sorts of topics, but made no friends, his poor reputation dragging behind him for years. Over time, of course, the rumours slowly started to die down and it faded a little, and some people forgot but his social situation did not improve any more. Now he was avoided "because that's the way it was done", without going into why, so, yes, everyone was polite, but that was it. But still, here the ostracism was less shown.

On top of that, there weren't a lot of fascinating tasks, nowadays it seemed like the main enemy was the Ministry, so usually Sirius was sent to do some petty crime like such as the wizard pretending to be a witch foretelling the future to Muggles or a medium making contact with spirits, or something like this, all through Legilimency. Boring, but better than nothing. Hell, he would have wanted to work in the Auror office even if the only job they offered him was as a cleaner, he was so thirsty for contact with others!

But he was too young, too full of energy, to simply surrender himself unchallenged and unreflected in the office work assigned to him. So sometimes he would step away from his desk and walk the long corridors of the Office. At first he did it cautiously, experimentally, but as no one admonished him, he became bolder. He explored room after room until he finally discovered something interesting - an archive room, filled to the ceiling with reams and reams of documents. All neatly arranged, divided into dates and apparently types of cases. It was Eldorado, here most willingly wandered Sirius and looked through various files, trying to pass the time.

One time, when he looked in another drawer and pulled out a pile of papers which he had looked through briefly, in complete shock, he realised that Remus, like all those who had lost their magic and led a Muggle life, had regularly updated files about himself and that Sirius was holding them in his hand. With his heart beating wildly he quickly put them away in a drawer which he promptly closed, for some reason not wanting to be caught out, and retreated to his office. For a while this put an end to his form of time-killing, the temptation was too strong.

But soon, unable to restrain himself, Sirius stole a copy of this file from the Auror's office and from time to time, surreptitiously, watched him as he went from home to work or shopping or walking. Not often, oh no, he didn't stalk him, just made sure he was alive and somehow managing. This knowledge Sirius needed in order to cope mentally somehow.

Remus seemed to lead a fairly comfortable life, working in the library, having a few friends with whom he went out for coffee or to the park from time to time. Sirius never confronted him, of course, preferring not to risk an unpleasant, heartbreaking confrontation, barely able to cover the worst layers of remorse and put them to sleep, not strong enough to face the truth face to face. And yet his pain was only a poor reflection of the pain Remus must have felt anyway.

Sometimes Sirius felt like crying, and sometimes he did, out of sorrow that he had so badly destroyed his life and, above all, Remus' with this stupid "joke". How stupid he was, how very, very stupid. If he could, he would turn back time, but that was impossible. Remus had long lived the life of Muggle, and Sirius, after all, did not fare too badly.

At times when he most needed reassurance and warmth he looked at the pictures from Hogwarts for hours, the laughing faces of Remus, James, Peter and himself, and it seemed like a dream to him. The sound of their laughter still rang in his ears. Sirius moved his finger across the faces of

his friends, tenderly, as if he were touching the real them and not their image, watching Remus look surprised at the camera for a moment and then turn his face away with an embarrassed smile, forever repeating the movement.

He missed that time so much, he would have given up everything to be able to step into it and forever remain in that moment captured in the amber world of the photograph.

One evening, feeling particularly nostalgic and wanting to chase the past, to feel like he was 17 again, he transformed into an Animagus and set off into the night. Trying not to think about the present, he ran through meadows, sniffing everything, attempting to chase a rabbit for a moment, trying to evoke that feeling of excitement and freedom, of carefreeness and boundless happiness that he longed for. But nothing came of it; with each passing moment, he felt increasingly lonely and abandoned. Without friends, it wasn't the same.

Eventually, he gave up, surrendered, ran back to his motorbike, and returned to his human form. Then he sat on the ground, leaning his back against the machine, and cried, sobbing aloud, not caring if anyone could hear him. With tears, he expelled all his despair and longing, the sense of loss. When he finally regained composure, he returned to the cold, empty, seemingly lifeless Grimmauld Place, the place where he had been buried while still alive.

He never repeated such an outing again.

Nevertheless, however slowly it happened, his current situation was slowly improving, or at least Sirius tried to believe so. Sirius didn't really care about his position in society Wizing anyway and his marriage to Snape had been much better recently. Who would have expected so much to depend on sex!

The thought of Severus having someone was a blow, an awakening. He hadn't expected it to ever come to this, it wasn't even that Severus would have an affair, it was just that it would shake him so much, and that he would care.

Every evening when his spouse came home, Sirius wondered if someone's hands had touched him, if someone had kissed him and he not only allowed it but even wanted it.

To him, Severus always approached with such clear reluctance, even disgust.... Oh, how much it hurt Sirius, how much it filled him with self-loathing!

On top of that, it seemed that Severus had got what he dreamed of, what he wanted with all his being - love, someone who cared, who made life meaningful and worthwhile.

Now that Sirius already knew that Severus not only did not love this guy but also did not sleep with him, it had a soothing effect on his mood. And the fact that he could now easily bring him to orgasm and have him writhing in his arms and asking for more made him start to regain his self-confidence.

Sex allowed him to take his mind off his lack of love, and sexy, (because Severus, depending on his mood, could be the sexiest person in the world and the most repulsive one. It was his special gift!) willing partner made it even easier. Before, each month's fucking with Severus started to give him panic attacks, at the very thought of it he started to sweat, eventually he began to have erection problems. It was unbearable.

He had won, at least here!

Of course Sirius knew that Snape still hated him, he didn't make a secret of it, and although he usually had the impression that he was speaking into a void and the echo answered him, sometimes they did manage to talk normally and it was so different, surprising, very enjoyable. Those

moments showed that maybe there was a chance for them to have a normal relationship. It was a substitute for normality, and beggars can't be choosers, so Sirius was grateful even for the crumbs of it.

This was most often after sex, when they were both lying down tired and satiated, and Severus' body, as never in any other situation, was so relaxed, soft and warm. Severus was losing himself completely during intercourse, becoming undone. It was the only time they had anything like closeness. His personality was different then too, less hostile and defensive, more frank and casual.

When Sirius first realised that Severus was simply afraid, that he was stressed and frightened when they were about to have sex, then for the first time he felt something like affection for him and tried very hard to make it easier for him, with words and touch to guide him through it, to soothe his fright, to remove the stress. He saw his weakness and vulnerability, something that Severus tried to hide from the world and it strangely moved him. And although at first he feared that it would not work, the sight of slightly trembling, tense muscles and the pale, anxious face of his spouse made him uncertain, it did work and Sirius could not believe the transformation that had taken place in Severus.

He had gone from being sexually frigid and reluctant to someone insatiable during sex, and Sirius was affected like a drug by his absolute lack of shame and behaviour, as he acted like a predator who smelled blood and was now driven only by instincts as he grabbed Sirius' wrist with one hand and guided his fingers, while the other hand grabbed his head and held it where he needed it. His loss of self-control, his behaviour completely off-guard made Sirius never want to stop giving it to him, if only to have him like this when he was like a ragdoll, soft and almost liquid and the edges of his personality, usually so sharp that Sirius repeatedly cut himself on them, were then smoothed out.

Sirius liked what he saw and heard, he could very easily like him like that. Therefore, on those moments when he managed to convince Severus to stay the night, Sirius sometimes allowed himself to wake Severus up with kisses in the morning, which sometimes ended with morning sex and sometimes with getting a slap on the head and complaining and growling from Severus who had had a worse day. But it was still worth the risk!

He sorely lacked partnership, he wanted to love and be loved, he craved affection, understanding, someone to cuddle with. He simply wanted a relationship.

And he wanted friendship, too, anything that wasn't this monstrous cold. That's why he took him out to hang out with his workmates and with the Potters and the Pettigrews, he wanted Severus to slowly become part of Sirius' world, and for the same reason he himself constantly accompanied him everywhere, he wanted Severus to get used to him. Oh, of course Sirius wasn't an idiot, he knew Severus was forcing himself to do all the things Sirius had asked him to do. But he hoped that in time he would get used to him, discover him as a person and maybe like him.

In his life with Severus, he felt like a bull in a china shop, everything was so fragile, one careless move was enough to destroy everything, and all the time he was doing it. Sirius knew that despite how much he cared, he was not able to treat Severus normally, he was flawed, damaged and no matter how much he tried he was always doing something wrong, always wanting too much from him, another word, a look, a touch, anything to reassure him that he wasn't alone. He knew how pathetic it was and that it pissed Severus off, of course, but hope for it will happen was the only thing keeping him sane.

With time he had become so accustomed to Severus' face that he no longer judged him in the pretty/ugly category, it was simply Severus. When Sirius thought about it more, he wondered to himself why he used to think of him as ugly, he wasn't like that in the slightest. He was simply a very slim, slender, petite boy with a serious, fascinating beauty. But, on the other hand, it was possible that Severus had grown more handsome over time, who knows. Sometimes Sirius would catch himself thinking that some Muggle singers like Patti Smith or Cher were beautiful and damn sexy, with their birdlike leanness, long black hair and big noses and then realise that it was because they reminded him of Snape. They just looked familiar to him, homely, and he had positive associations with this type of beauty.

Of course, he never told Snape about it, he knew that he would be met with a mocking look and a malicious comment, one hundred percent referring to the fact that Sirius had once wanted to kill him and rape him.

Huh, it was a hopeless case, he had already apologised to him for it and tried to convince him that he didn't really want to kill him, he just wanted to scare him, but it fell on deaf ears, Snape knew his own. Sirius hoped that he had at least forgiven him for the abhorrent event of their wedding night.

Worse still, it seemed that Severus did not recognise that many years had passed since then and Sirius had simply grown up, was no longer that silly boy.

All Severus saw in him was the guy who had tried to kill him, strong, confident and feisty. It didn't even occur to him for a second that this might not have been the case, that it was already gone.

Little is left of him, that's for sure. Gone was the foolishly self-satisfied, enjoying life carefree, risk-loving lad. Now Sirius lived with a tons of regrets, defeated but still trying to walk upright. A pathetic wreck of a man only in appearance resembling that stupid boy who came up with the idea for this marriage.

For a moment he was an alcoholic, but that is thankfully in the past, he still drank a lot but was now in control.

Severus himself had also changed a lot, from that boy who was perpetually stressed, nervous, always sticking his nose into things that were not for him, he had changed into an aloof, confident young successful man.

He succeeded, he succeeded, Sirius repeated to himself. It was hard to believe!

He liked to see him like this, he liked it when Severus spoke with his beautiful, cold, expressionless voice and everyone listened to him with fascination. That is why he accompanied him to all symposia or meetings with readers. Just like now.

He shouldn't have laughed at Severus's irritation at the hickey but it was stronger than him. Now he was punished for it with a cold demeanour and an offended silence until they went to bed. Yes, they had slept together, but Severus did not want sex; when Sirius stroked his shoulder, he turned his back to him, clearly sulking. Sirius sighed in spirit. He didn't understand him, after all everyone knew they were married, it wasn't like anyone thought he was a virgin.

As soon as they were awake, bathed and dressed, all in silence, Severus made a ruckus.

"Why didn't you tell me I had a hickey on the side of my neck?" He stood with his head as high as ever and his shoulders drawn back, and with the aforementioned hickey even more clearly visible than yesterday. Sirius admired him for holding out for so long, he knew him well enough to know that with his explosive personality he had certainly been tempted to make a ruckus for quite some time.

"You knew you had it, why would I tell you?" He shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

Snape walked a little closer towards him, hissing angrily. "This was an official outing, a serious meeting, Sirius! I know the word 'serious' doesn't mean anything to you, but it was important to me! I didn't want to appear so vulgar there!"

Sirius looked at him for a moment, as if waiting for something, and finally began to laugh. "Vulgar? Oh, come on! I swear to you it shocked no one." Ah, Severus and his strange prudishness. Not the sort of thing this social class had seen, hickey was among the most modest things they showed to the world.

He assessed with a glance his husband's face, pale with anger, and his lips, tightly pressed together. The best form of defence is attack, Sirius judged, and so he did. "Anyway, what do you mean, it's probably a good thing that everyone saw it? At least there is no doubt that we are truly married. YOU don't care about that at all!"

This silenced Severus for a moment; he could not argue with it.

"Come to me." Sirius held out his hand and waited. It wouldn't hurt for them to let off a little steam before heading back out. After a brief hesitation, Severus approached him, of course he did not take his hand, for as Sirius judged, it was still Severus after all, luckily instead he lifted his arms and wrapped them around Sirius' neck, who was at least half a head taller than him, inclining his head to kiss him, with that wild passion and slight aggression that Sirius enjoyed so much.

By the time they left the hotel room Sirius had him leaning against the door, with his legs wrapped around his hips and then again, on the bed. After that, one more bath was necessary, Severus had to hide a lot more hickeys with the beauty spell than just the one he fussed about so much and they were able to start on their way back.

There was no end to Severus' anguish, as Sirius, laughing in spirit, judged at the sight of Mr. Seamus, who, wishing to bid them farewell in person, stepped out from somewhere and startling Severus walking in a somewhat strange way.

Severus was once again offended at Sirius all the way home.

Life in Grimmauld Place returned to normal, Severus as always spending his days in his apothecary and in his study, writing a book, experimenting or God knows what doing and Sirius working from 8am to 4pm in the Auror office, and occasionally dropping in to see Severus, who was reluctant to visit him, or occasionally meeting the Potters or Pettigrews.

He had an appointment with the Potters that day. Without Severus.

As soon as he stepped out of the Floo in their living room he saw that it wasn't the best time to visit, Lily and James, both with large circles under their eyes looked sleep deprived and tired, the living room was messy and Harry was crying in the bathroom.

"Oh, you should have told me you were having a crisis, I'd have dropped by another time." Sirius felt stupid and out of place.

Family life wasn't always picture perfect, as he had managed to observe, so he didn't want to disturb his friends all the more.

"No, it's fine, it's good that you stopped by." James denied it but in Sirius' opinion it didn't sound very sincere. "Lily, love, why don't you go lie down for a nap, you could use some sleep." James looked like it wouldn't hurt him either, that's for sure.

Lily, with eyes puffy and red from crying, nodded her head in gratitude. "You are a real treasure." She kissed James on the cheek and stroked his face. "In a moment!" She turned back to Sirius.

"And how do you get on with Severus?"

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. "Neither good nor bad."

Both Potters nodded their heads at the same time, which Sirius found charming.

"What do you want from him?"

Good question, actually, what exactly did he want?

"Oh..." Sirius tilted his head with a slight smile, searching for the right words. Finally, he found them. "For him to give me a chance." That pretty much encapsulated everything.

"A chance to do what?"

Sirius shrugged his shoulders again. "I don't know. Just, a chance."

Lily furrowed her brow. "That's not how it works Sirius, you don't know what you want yourself, so it's even less possible for him to know."

Ehh, this conversation was getting difficult and Sirius was not prepared for it, he felt vulnerable and weak, but he was around friends so he could afford it. "I want him to talk to me. Now it's just me talking and him listening. I feel like I'm talking to a dummy."

He met Lily's gaze filled with concern. "You need to be more patient and understanding, not push him too hard." She covered her mouth with her hand and yawned. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'll take James' suggestion."

As she got up from the couch, Sirius noticed that her dress was stained with baby food and didn't look its freshest. "We are really very glad you came, Sirius. You are like a ray of light." She yawned intently, covering her mouth with the back of her hand. "I'm sorry, but I'm falling down."

She looked that way too, there was no exaggeration in it. When she was finally able to burrow into the bedclothes in the comfort of their bedroom, Sirius looked towards the bathroom door. "What's wrong?"

"Harry is having a meltdown and needs a moment to himself. I tried to comfort him but he didn't want it." James yawned discreetly as well. "As you know we have managed to teach Harry to pee on the potty, but he still won't poop on the toilet. He holds it for three or four days until I give him a nappy and then he goes."

Ah, it's that kind of problem. Sirius was, of course, up to date with all of Harry's developmental stages, from his first poo to his first tooth, first step and first word. He nodded his head letting James know to continue so he did.

"Now Harry is in pain because he is constipated from not going. He was up all night and crying and was very restless. Obviously we didn't even sleep for a minute."

James looked like he was also on the verge of crying from exhaustion. Sirius quickly made a decision.

"You know what, why don't you go to sleep too, I'll sit with him? You know how much I love him, he loves me too, I'll try to calm him down and you get some sleep, you'll tire yourself to death." He was sorry to see his friends tormented, it was all he could do to help them.

This life was so different from his own, one he would never have. Well, you've made your bed, then sleep in it, Sirius judged, and began to clean the flat by picking up scattered toys, carrying dishes to the kitchen and washing them, all by hand even though he could do it by magic. He needed some physical thing, something to absorb his thoughts. By occupying himself with this, he was able to pretend for a moment that he was part of this life. Domestic chaos, love, care, weariness but also satisfaction.

Something he will never have because he destroyed with his own hands the chance for it. He wiped away the tear that had escaped with the palm of his hand and concentrated on his occupation. Crying was no use, it would not help him in any way.

When he had dealt with this, he went to fetch Harry, who, tired of crying, had fallen asleep on a bed made of towels. The little one, on seeing him, woke up and started crying and shouting again. "Hey, Harry! It's me, Sirius! What's wrong, why are you crying?" His calm tone made the child hesitate.

Sirius picked him up in his arms, smiled reassuringly, kissed the chubby cheek of the toddler and carried him into the living room, adding Floo Powder to the fireplace to contact Severus.

A moment later he saw his irritated husband, facing him sideways, with his head bent over whatever he was doing, wearing a stained apron over his work robe, just as he usually did when he worked, his hair tied up in a ponytail, and behind him, potions utensils, notes and some bottles of something spread out on the counter.

"What is it, Sirius?" Even if he had made a special effort, his voice could not have expressed less interest than it did now.

"Gee, aren't you a sunshine today?" Sirius smiled crookedly.

Severus didn't even give him one look, still measuring something and checking his notes. "Spare me. If all you wanted to tell me was this, you might not have done it at all. I don't know if you noticed but I'm working right now."

To emphasise his words, he picked up a bottle, took the cork out of it and smelled the contents.

"Of course, darling, I can just see it." Sirius knew he shouldn't tease him, but this was stronger than he was.

"Do you want me to disconnect the call?"

This was the moment Harry chose to start crying again.

The sudden, sharp sound made Severus twitch slightly, but apparently he had managed not to add the wrong dose of ingredients because instead of getting angry, he made a joke, or at least Sirius thought that was his intention. "Gosh, Sirius, stop crying, I was joking, I didn't know it would move you that much."

Sirius rolled his eyes. "Ha ha, very funny. Harry's been constipated for a few days and his tummy hurts. I thought you could easily prepare a cure for that."

This time Severus lifted his head and looked towards the fireplace. "That you are playing baby sitter is your business, but why are you trying to involve me in this, and in this way? A constipation remedy for a baby? For real? "

Once this mocking tone of his would have made Sirius want to punch him in the face, but now he had learned Severus, and knew that he was simply like that.

They looked into each other's eyes for a moment. "So you don't know how to do something like that?"

Severus turned his face away and returned to his occupation. "Don't try to tease me, it doesn't work on me. I'll get back to you in about half an hour, maybe an hour," and disconnected the call.

Half an hour later Sirius picked up a bottle of medicine from Floo, one dose, tasty enough that Harry treated it as dessert and ate it himself. By the time James and Lily got up the constipation problem had been solved.

1983.05 Severus

The fireplace buzzed and Sirius disappeared into the Floo. Finally.

Noisily placing vials and containers on the table, Severus paced around the laboratory. Sirius came to him to work every day. Every. Fucking. Day. Sirius was the kind of man who simply couldn't stand to be alone, he needed the company of other people. Exactly the opposite of Severus.

It wasn't even about what Sirius was doing, although Severus could not concentrate in the company of Sirius' chatter, he could either follow the flow of conversation or work, just the mere fact of his presence.

To make matters worse, Severus had the feeling that he couldn't even let Sirius out of his sight for a moment, because he was as unreasonable as a child.

Sirius, as always, accompanied him before his work, and that morning, while Severus was busy preparing the order, Sirius picked up a sheet of paper from a pile of others and read aloud what was written there "ingredientes necessarios ex in tenebris lucem producere" and then turned to Severus. "Do you know Latin?"

He quickly left what he was dealing with and concentrated on Sirius. "Yes, I know." Severus took a piece of paper from his hand. "That's the list of necessary ingredients to bring forth light from the darkness. Do you ever think about what you're doing? That might have been a spell you just recited, not a recipe for a potion."

Instead of being concerned, Sirius smiled broadly at the annoyed look on his spouse's face. "But it wasn't."

The look in the black eyes did not bode well. "But you didn't know that."

"I may not know Latin, my dear, but I understand words such as ingredientes, necessarios and producere." Sirius smirked again and grabbed the passing Severus by the waist. "There could be nothing dangerous there."

This attempt to fend off an unpleasant situation did not escape Severus, so with a sigh he let Sirius' rebuke go. "Why do you think that?"

Sirius's warmth radiated from his hand, spreading over Severus's body from where it was touched. His husband's other hand came to rest on his back, pressing Severus against his firm chest. "It's unlikely you'd keep it out."

Severus merely lifted his face and sent him a look that said "Think again." But he said nothing more, instead letting himself be hugged for a moment.

Although he often complained about this in his mind, Severus had grown accustomed to his life, to this everyday routine, calm, filled with the scent of fresh roses, chemicals, potions, herbs, and Sirius' wine-saturated breath mingled with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

Life unfolded slowly amidst the hustle and bustle of countless pressing matters, amidst morning coffees sipped in the company of raindrops tapping against the windowsill and morning conversations with Sirius. He enjoyed his work routine, but he was terrible at the mundanity of life; it overwhelmed him, and he got lost in it. His world revolved around knowledge, not keeping track of dates and travel directions, or remembering who he should know.

He tried to rein in this chaos, purchasing a calendar for that purpose. It was still chaos, but now it was controlled.

And Sirius was a natural part of that.

Sometimes, not too often he would turn his mind off for a while, so that Sirius' voice came to him like a melody, a meaningless hum that accompanied him like something familiar, not threatening, the background of life.

And sometimes, against his own resolve, Severus listened to the excited chatter, and took part in it, letting it carry him away and later regretted it. He was never sure how long the ceasefire lasted, when Sirius would get tired of it. He didn't want to get too used to it.

But he never complained about anything to him, Sirius clearly enjoyed the visits, and if they could guarantee his good mood then they were worth the price.

We are a well-matched pair, Severus thought exasperatedly while carefully mashing the dried out beetles brought from Egypt. The black glittering heap lying in the bowl slowly diminished, while the amount of black dust in the crystal bottle increased.

He had already managed to translate the first chapter of the old transcript, which was not an easy task, so he was all the more pleased with himself, now he was going to check the recipes.

Severus was very excited about it and simply could not wait to prepare these potions. He would have got on with it quicker had it not been for Sirius and his constant interference.

A nuisance with this guy, the potion master thought. He sighed in spirit and shook his head in displeasure.

Yesterday they were at their monthly inspection, nothing new, nothing different from usual and Sirius, of course, had to make a scene. Severus, as always, passed through the gate quickly and the inspection was over, but not Sirius, he had to make things difficult.

So he had no choice but with his mouth clenched in anger, watched as Sirius, after passing through the gate, began to unbutton his jeans. At the last moment Severus managed to stop him with a sharp shout, just before the bent Sirius took off his trousers together with his underpants and unbuttoned them, so that, to quote him, "the officials could see it with their own eyes for greater certainty". Not that there was anything there to confirm these check ups, because Severus never took to this sex position, he simply wasn't interested in it. But, of course, Sirius had to do it anyway, to make a point.

The officials turned red in the faces but let them leave.

He was so angry for some reason, that Severus had trouble getting him out of there before he made more trouble for them. All the way home, Sirius was throwing angry comments and spite at the Ministry while Severus walked beside him in silence, knowing better than to try to calm him down. Nothing good would come of it, and he didn't want to blow a brawl in the street. At home his husband got drunk and complained for hours.

Yes, it is more difficult with him than with the child.

Severus sighed heavily again and went back to work. From the translated part of the book, he selected a potion designed to make one see in the dark for several hours, depending on how potent the potion was. "Potion of Night Vision." A name that is simple but has something mysterious in Severus' opinion.

It was a very useful invention. If it proves to be worth the effort, he intends to include it in his next book.

Once again he checked the list of ingredients and compared the items he had purchased.

Everything was ready and waiting to be used, so he set to work with vigour.

Severus although confident that he had translated correctly, he compared the translation with the

original just in case. He moved his finger across the text "triticum Vulgare, in pulverem redige et cum aqua combinare. Ignis infernalis adhibe donec color mutet " he muttered to himself "grind wheat into powder and combine with water. Apply infernal fire until the color changes." Good, everything was translated perfectly. Reassured, he put the book in a safe place and got to work.

He efficiently chopped everything that was to be chopped and crushed what was to be crushed, then mixed it together and threw it into a steaming cauldron hovering in the air over the fire at the height of his chest.

Severus started with the beetles. These were not easy to get and he waited a very long time for delivery, but he did not complain, the most important thing was that they were already here. They were the most important component, as apparently they contained a special enzyme that could help a person see in the dark. He carefully crushed them into a fine powder and added them to his potion cauldron.

Next, he added a few drops of unicorn blood to the mixture. The unicorn blood would help amplify the effects of the beetle enzyme and make the potion even more potent. Then he also added a few drops of bat wing extract, which would help the person's eyes adjust to the darkness more quickly, then a handful of dried nightshade berries, which would give the potion its distinctive black color. A pinch of powdered silver joined to the mix, which would help reflect any light that was available, making it easier to see in the dark.

Salamander blood: this rare ingredient was prized for its ability to enhance the potency of potions, and that it would have a similar effect on his darkness-seeing potion.

Finally, Severus added a small amount of ground-up moonstone. This was the final ingredient that would help make the potion truly effective. This shimmering powder was said to possess strong magical properties related to the moon, which is believed would enhance the potion's potency.

As ever, a few drops of this, a few drops of that, hair, skin and bones of various animals until everything was ready and the only thing left to do was to wait for the decoction to be prepared, Severus mused. There were endless possibilities, basically only imagination stood in the way. And talent.

The liquid changed colour to an opaline sheen. Severus stirred it three times, as per the recipe, and chanted incantations under his breath. It should soon turn glossy black with flecks of silver glimmering like stars in an inked sky.

As the potion simmered in the cauldron, Severus, in order not to waste time and to shorten the wait, began to translate the next page. He loved a mental challenge, something that required commitment, intelligence and concentration, predictable activities quickly bored him.

His mood was further boosted by the knowledge that in his small office adjacent to his studio, on his desk, lay a pile of congratulatory letters, invitations and also the thing that pleased and interested him most - the contract for his next book, this time on much better financial terms. The future looked brighter and brighter.

After a few minutes, he raised his head. Something was wrong with the potion, it was bubbling too much and threatening to overflow.

Severus stood up and stirred it, trying to judge by the colour and smell what he might have done wrong, but this was difficult due to the fact that he had never worked with some of the ingredients before.

He suddenly wrinkled his nose. The smell was undoubtedly wrong, his instincts told him. Well, he will not despair about it, he will simply try to correct it, Severus judged and raised his wand to move the cauldron from above the fire and let it cool down. Before he could do so, however, he heard a sharp hiss and the cauldron and its contents exploded, sending Severus to the floor.

He tried to get up and look for the wand that had fallen out of his hand, but it was so dark, he could not see it. He couldn't draw breath either, there was no oxygen in the room, somehow the explosion had removed it.

Severus sank back to the floor and pressed his palms to his chest. The noise in his ears drowned out his panting, and he felt himself losing consciousness. Sliding into unconsciousness would probably have bothered him less had it not been for the excruciating pain in his chest when he couldn't catch his breath.

He was suffocating. What a disgusting death, he judged, but no doubt appropriate for a chemist. With the last of his strength, he silently uttered a glass-shattering spell before his world turned black.

He emerged slowly from the nothingness.

First he felt a tickle in his throat and started coughing and this woke him up. He wanted to open his eyes but something prevented him from doing so. Not knowing where he was, he started to move his head and tried unsuccessfully to speak, and then he heard Sirius' voice.

"Oh god, Severus! You're awake! Doctor, he's awake!!!"

His voice was so very loud that Severus flinched. He tried again to open his eyes, but after a try or two he gave up, still too dazed and tired to understand what was happening, and after only a moment he sank back into the soft comfort of sleep.

Every now and then, he must have regained consciousness for a while because he had flashes of memories of conversations in front of him, Sirius with the doctor, James and Lily, even Mr. Seamus, Lucius, Narissa and Draco.

Why were they all coming to him? Am I in such a bad state? he thought, but he didn't have time to think about it too long when he fell asleep again.

Severus did not know how long he had been in this state, whether hours or weeks.

The days passed by, and he, apparently under the influence of painkillers, approached it with indifference. He felt nothing, no fear, no worries, nothing, just a continuous drowsiness, and that's how he spent almost all of his time.

One day, when his condition had finally stabilised, he simply woke up and did not fall asleep right away.

And suddenly, awareness came crashing down on him with full force. He had an accident, there was an explosion, and he was somehow injured. Terrified to the point of madness, feeling how wild panic was robbing him of breath, he wanted to check his condition so he moved, trying to reach his head when someone grabbed his wrist.

"No, leave it, don't touch the bandages." Sirius. Obviously, he had to do his duty as a proper husband and newly acquired friend or whoever he was trying to become for Severus.

Severus wanted to throw in some comment on the subject but only a grunt came out of his mouth.

"Don't try to speak. Your throat and vocal cords are still burned, if you try to speak now it's possible they will never recover."

The shock was immense. So, he couldn't speak.

Oh...

Severus swallowed his saliva as a test but felt no pain.

Sirius noticed it, of course. "You've been given strong painkillers, so you shouldn't feel any pain."

Severus moved his legs carefully - all was fine, he had control over them. The same with his arms. The question of the head remained. He tried once more to raise his arms but Sirius still held him. "Your eyes are bandaged, that's why you can't see. These fumes have burned them and your throat. You won't be able to see for a while, it all needs to heal. Do not worry, you are under the care of the best doctors." Sirius' voice sounded strange, slightly nasal. Had he caught a cold?

Suddenly, what Sirius said reached him - so not only did he temporarily lose his speech, but even worse, his sight. In horror, his throat tightened, and he struggled to swallow his saliva. It couldn't be true, it couldn't happen to him! He had the urge to jump up and tear off the bandages to assess the eye injuries by touch. He knew, of course, that it was irrational, but panic deprived him of sound judgment, the horror of the situation was winning over him.

He was aware that his breathing was speeding up, and in a moment, he could burst into tears. He couldn't let that happen. Trying to calm himself down, he focused on his surroundings, but the darkness surrounding him, emanating from within himself, didn't improve the situation. So something else, something positive. He quickly searched his mind and found something - he survived.

Yes, it was a good topic!

Severus was curious as to what had happened, why he was alive.

He didn't know how he should ask it, so he sighed in frustration.

"Are you nervous?" Sirius again. "What's the matter? Wait, you can't speak, let's try to find out another way. I'll list the suggestions, and you let me know if I get a hit, okay?"

Severus nodded. He wished Sirius would let go of his wrist but he didn't have the strength to tug at it.

"Does anything hurt? No. Ok. Do you need to use the restroom? No? Good. I don't think you're hungry because you're on extracorporeal nutrition, so it's not that..."

Severus stopped playing with subtleties and jerked his hand to show his annoyance.

"Can I call on your parents?"

Severus shook his head violently. No, absolutely not!

"I see. Or at least inform them?"

An equally violent shake of the head served as an answer.

"Ok, do you want to know how you got here?"

Severus nodded.

Sirius' hand moved from Severus' wrist to his palm, he placed Severus' hand over his own and intertwined his fingers with his. This gesture made Severus blush. This kind of tender touch was far more intimate than sex.

"Well, I found you." Sirius' voice was much quieter now than before. "You didn't come home for a long time, so I used Floo and saw you lying on the floor."

His hand clenched a little tighter on Severus' hand, which after a while was covered by the other hand as well.

It's true, the security features of his Floo were set up to let Sirius in at all times. Usually it annoyed Severus very much, but this one time it was useful.

The man sitting next to the bed was silent for a moment, as if he was gathering strength. "When I saw you, you were throwing yourself across the floor in convulsions, unconscious. You were vomiting. Your lips and skin were blue, you looked like you were dying. Those fumes had mostly dissipated, but when I went in there I immediately got dizzy. I don't know what you were preparing, but what came out was poison, or at least noxious fumes."

Such a sight must have been a shock to Black, it's not often you see an accident, so Severus understood the reason why he was so shaken.

Severus felt Sirius' fingers stroking his hand, apparently trying to reassure him. Or perhaps himself, judging by the slight tremor in his voice.

He nodded slightly again, as a sign that he understood. He tried to analyse what he had heard, but felt increasingly tired. Slowly drifting off into sleep again, his hand grew limp and apparently began to slip out of Sirius' hands.

"Are you going to sleep? That's good, you need sleep to recover. You will be fine, you will recover!" Severus did not know who Sirius was trying to convince, himself or him, but it did not matter. If he got stronger, he would assess his condition himself, after all, that was why he had learned the basics of medicine.

When he woke up again Sirius was still holding his hand, but differently than before, more loosely. From this and his breathing, Severus judged that he was asleep.

Good, he would have a moment to think about his situation. As he concentrated hard, he noticed that he was lying in bed with compresses on his head and over his eyes. He could smell the herbs and the energies of the magic with which he was being treated. Severus recognised them, Sirius did not lie, they were indeed using the treatment on his chemically burned eyes and throat.

One question bothered him.

Why had he saved him? After all, by virtue of Severus dying, Sirius would have his marriage recognised as over and the certainty of not losing his magic. He could have freed himself from this obligation and it would have been over. The death of his spouse would have made the marriage valid at any time during those 10 years. Sirius would already have had it settled. He could have broken free and gone on with his life, met someone and so on. So why did he save him?

After all, he had tried to kill him earlier, so he should have been glad that Severus had screwed up and should have left him to die. It's only natural, isn't it?

For what reason did he condemn himself to an extra five years with Severus, why did he risk his life for someone he used to hate, why?

Yes, he was probably lonely and bored, which is why he noticed Severus hadn't returned, but after all, he could have pretended not to see him through the apothecary window or he could have found him "too late." Oops, no big deal. Unless it was a newfound desire to make friends with Severus that pushed him in that direction. Was it really that important to Sirius?

He very much wanted to ask him about it, but for the moment it was impossible, so he had to be patient and think about it, meanwhile coming up with various theories.

Severus would fall asleep and wake up, he had no idea how long it had been since the accident. From time to time the doctor would come to see him and then the bandages would be pulled from his eyes and he would open his eyes, but despite this he could see nothing but the heavily misty outline of the doctor's silhouette leaning over him. Later the bandages were put back in place. He was distraught at the thought of losing his sight and his voice; without his voice, some spells would be impossible to use, and without his sight, he would never be able to prepare a potion again. He was comforted only by the doctor's words that it was all temporary.

Apparently, Sirius noticed his earlier agitation, as Severus once again didn't feel practically any emotions, so he suspected that he was being given calming substances. Perhaps it was for the best, as nothing good would come from constantly falling into panic and despair.

His throat was also examined, he was watered with various decoctions, ointments were applied. From time to time, someone wiped the sweat from his face and pulled back his hair. Severus tried to protest with a murmur and then the hand would disappear. He was washed twice a day by magic so he did not stink.

He was almost never alone in his bedroom, as he presumed that was where he was. He could not smell the room because everything was drowned out by the smells of herbs and medicines, but he could often feel a hand, most likely Sirius', holding his hand, hear him moving around, sometimes quietly talking to someone about his work, and sometimes saying something to him, comforting him and reassuring him that everything will be fine.

He never felt hungry and was watered regularly so he did not feel thirsty either.

When he was awake, time flowed like resin on a log, as slowly as if he were standing still. All he could do was think, so he did, with calm, slow thoughts, even when he was thinking about tormenting subjects. One thing was certain, he constantly tried to avoid even brushing his mind against the topic of his temporary disability. No, it was better not to touch that. A much better subject to ponder was the matter of Sirius.

It seemed that Sirius was the one who spent his days with him and it was he who sometimes stroked his cheek, brushed back his hair and wiped his forehead of sweat. Why? Severus did not understand any of this. Truly Sirius has taken it upon himself to mend relations with him, that's for sure!

This concern of his, this tenderness confused Severus, he did not know what to think of it.

Sometimes this gentle touch made Severus feel tears gathering in the corners of his eyes.

Fortunately, before they fell and rolled down his cheeks, they soaked into the bandages. How pathetic, to cry for such a reason, Severus was angry at himself.

In his mind he sent Sirius a whole mantra of questions.

Why do you treat me like a human being, why did you save my life, why do you care for me?

What are you pretending? What are you trying to achieve this way? Is this another attempt at "befriending"?

Will you leave me and our "friendship" when the opportunity arises, when your friends have more time for you? Is this a joke? Did anyone tell you to do this? What do you want from me, Sirius, tell me!

Sirius, of course, never responded to these questions, and why should he, in order to know them he would have had to violate the remnants of trust Severus had in him. And good thing, too, because Severus wasn't sure he'd dare ask them out loud.

Still, not knowing what Sirius's intentions were, Severus preferred to push back against his touch, taking his hand from his hand and protesting with a murmur against excessive affection.

One day Mr. Seamus came to see him, and Sirius, for some reason, was not in the bedroom. Severus turned his face towards the sound of the door opening.

"Hello Severus!" A friendly voice made him turn his face in the direction from which it came.

"How are you feeling? Your husband said you are slowly getting stronger, but you still should not speak." Severus heard footsteps approaching and then Mr. Seamus sat down in a chair by the bed.

"You will be cured of this, boy, all of us including me are working on new cures for your eyes.

Your husband is moving heaven and earth to help you." Mr. Seamus paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts. "I'm glad you have someone who cares about you so much, I was worried about you. You always seemed so alienated. It's good that you have someone who loves you so much." Severus twitched violently when he heard this.

Sirius really had to work hard to maintain the semblance of a perfect marriage, that had to be given to him. "I'm sure you'll be pleased to know that for the two weeks you've been lying here he's hardly left your side, it's rare to find such devotion. I spoke to your doctor, he told your husband to rest, surely you would not want him to fall ill from worry and fatigue. He only listened to the doctor, ignoring the pleas of your friends." Our friends? Hmmm - Severus guessed he was referring to the Potters.

Sirius always did everything to excess.

Severus regretted that he couldn't tell him that it was enough if he only sat by him when guests were announced. It is enough, he has already made a name for himself as a wonderful husband. Obviously Sirius used the accident to take time off from work, where Severus sure everyone felt sorry for him: "Poor Sirius, his husband almost blew himself up! Let's give him a few weeks' holiday".

His eyelids were getting heavier and heavier, Mr. Seamus said something else but Severus slowly fell asleep.

When he woke up again, he was being held by the hand by Sirius.

1983.05 Sirius

After another week Severus was able to take in food in liquid form and to get out of bed, which at first he did clumsily and cautiously, fumbling around, then he turned an object into a blind man's stick and thus checked his surroundings. Slowly he regained his voice and could already whisper, but it was not recommended to speak much so he almost did not do it. Sirius missed the normal conversations after sex, Severus' angry comments, even the way he argued. The silence made him feel more alone. He wanted to hear his voice.

The realisation of how much he had relied on Severus's company hit him hard. He became addicted to it as if it were a drug.

The silence filled the house and Sirius's thoughts, enveloping everything in a dense cocoon. For some reason, normal volume of voices seemed too loud, almost like a scream when that one voice was missing.

Every corner of the house echoed the emptiness Severus had left behind, and yet the ball was only temporary. He was still here, only he lay weak, timid and blind in one of the rooms. Still, for Sirius the once familiar routine now seemed empty and incomplete.

The absence of Severus at breakfast and dinner robbed Sirius of his appetite. He sadly looked at the empty seat across from him, at the bouquet of roses, always standing on the table, and hurried with his meal to quickly find himself in Severus's bedroom again, by his side, as Severus still spent most of his time lying in bed while Sirius doubled and tripled his efforts around him, bringing him books for magical listening, fresh flowers to make the room smell nice, engaging him in conversation, and fluffing up the pillow Severus was lying on. He did everything to just kill the fear.

The last few weeks have been like a nightmare; Sirius has felt very mentally exhausted. Often out of stress he couldn't concentrate his thoughts, his pulse pounding in his ears. It was so easy to die, so damn easy. Until now, it seemed almost abstract to him, a situation that happened when someone chose it and committed suicide because young people didn't die, right?

Yes, accidents did happen, but they were always others, never us. That's how the world worked, wasn't it? Something you read about in the newspapers. And now the dark wings of death brushed against their home, reminding them that it could happen to them too, not just to others.

He never thought he would be so horrified at the sight of Severus lying in his own vomit, looking like the dead, a sight that would haunt him for a long time to come, of that he was certain. What if he had been a few minutes late? If he hadn't been bothered by Severus being late and not picking up the Floo, when he finally dragged his husband's inert, strangely grey body out of the laboratory and when the doctor assured him that Severus would live, Sirius only with the last remnants of reason refrained from returning there and burning down the cursed place, destroying it to the ground. Of course, he was aware that his hatred was unfounded, it wasn't the place that led to the accident, it was Severus' actions, but Sirius needed something to blame and to focus all his anger on.

Apparently he wasn't the only one who felt this way. Sirius grimly recalled it when he turned up at the Malfoy's Floo to deliver the news. Lucius created a real commotion, looking suspiciously at Sirius as he spoke, behaving as if he suspected it was actually an attempt on Severus's life. He clearly liked him and was concerned about his welfare. Although Sirius had not observed anything of the sort, clearly Severus and the Malfoys were more friendly with each other than their

infrequent encounters would suggest.

Lucius probably didn't kill him only because Sirius wasn't near him at the time.

Sirius rolled his eyes, what a stubborn idiot! If he wanted to kill Severus, he wouldn't have saved him, right? But Lucius would surely have an answer to that, Sirius was certain of it.

After the visit to Severus, the entire Malfoy family looked at him with reproach, as Sirius was certain he saw accusation even in the eyes of young Draco. Huh, life was tough with the label of a would-be murderer, especially when you had a family like his. Probably even his enemies would approach him with more understanding!

After a few days, when Severus' condition finally began to slowly improve, Sirius gritted his teeth and went to the lab, not to destroy it, however, but to clean it up and repair it. He knew how much Severus loved this place. He did it for him.

Every single thing he had put there was personally chosen by Severus, unlike in his quarters at Grimmauld Place where he didn't change anything, leaving the rooms exactly as they were before he moved in. Here, every tiny element, every detail was inspected, chosen, and purchased by him. Every thing had meaning; nothing was unnecessary. The room was like a temple for Severus's mind, a tribute to his intellect.

Sirius carefully and thoughtfully touched each vial, each cauldron, and suddenly everything held greater value than it originally had. Severus had chosen it!

Seeing him so close to death made something in Sirius' heart crack, open like a nut shell, and something from within came out. Suddenly, all other worries and concerns shrank to the size of grains of sand and became insignificant. Loneliness turned out to be not the greatest, it could have been worse. The feeling of being misunderstood vanished, and the life that he considered wasted turned out to be quite good after all.

All of Sirius' thoughts were now focused on one point. The only thing that mattered was the man lying in the bed. He realised that Severus had become very important to him, much more than he had expected, than he had realised.

With some surprise, he realised, that he was never bored of standing vigil by Severus for hours, counting his breaths, wiping the sweat off him, waiting for those brief moments when he woke up.

The worst thing was that he had to hide it from his family, because if his parents knew about it now, they would have made the situation a thousand times more difficult with their advice and comments. He could already imagine their intrusive questions, exaggerated shouts and admonitions. No, he definitely preferred to avoid that.

But, with some uncertainty, he told about it at his work, because he needed to take days off to look after Severus. There, to his surprise, everyone approached it with surprising forbearance and showed him a great deal of support, also promising to keep it discreet so that the information did not leak to The Daily Prophet. It was also shocking, he was used to being always slightly on the side. Perhaps this tragedy allowed them to see the human in him.

Perhaps, perhaps. In any case, Sirius unscrupulously took advantage of this kindness and did not leave Grimmauld Place.

As Severus took his first steps Sirius had to restrain himself not to catch and hold him as he walked wobbly ahead. It seemed that Severus' muscles had forgotten how to walk during those days spent in bed.

In a coarse whisper, he asked Sirius to show him the way to the bathroom, living room and dining room and then learn the route.

He looked so very breakable, so vulnerable and not like Snape, in his robe that he had magically put on and with a black ribbon tied around his eyes. But he also seemed so determined, trying with all his might.

This sight shook Sirius very much, and although in front of him he tried not to show what an impression it made on him, after Severus was already asleep, Sirius had to go to the Potters and get drunk almost to the point of unconsciousness.

Black could see the slight surprise in James's eyes when he spoke to him about Severus, how worried he was about him and how much he wanted to protect him, as if he didn't quite understand the meaning of Sirius' words, but perhaps it was Sirius himself who didn't understand them?

Anyway, his friend said nothing. Perhaps it was for the best, because there was no telling what he meant and Sirius was now very stressed so he could very easily explode with uncontrollable rage. Lily also seemed surprised, but this quickly disappeared and once again her face only expressed worry about the whole situation. It was well understood, it was natural, and for this concern for Severus Sirius was grateful to her.

It was a depressing sight, unbearable. This always proud, cold, seemingly indestructible man turned out to be so fragile. Fragile as people are, as Lily said. But at the same time he was indestructible, he got damaged but not destroyed. He fought all the time.

And so he approached it without complaint, without tears, without objection. Sirius in his place would have gone out of his mind, lamenting and hysterical. Severus acted as if it didn't make much of a difference to him, as if he KNEW it was temporary and all he had to do was just wait and everything would be fine. Sirius did not understand him but admired him.

After evenings spent like this, Sirius was tired and hungover in the mornings, but, not wanting to waste time together with Severus, he dealt with it with sobering potion and coffee.

Severus, tenacious and stubborn as ever was so calm, so accepting of the situation. As stoic as ever, showing no stress he did everything he was advised to do without complaining. Patiently, assiduously, he learned to live in the new, transitional, as everyone hoped, reality, and Sirius along with him.

The doctor explained to them that Severus' sight was slowly returning, but that his eyes recovered better in the dark, so it would be better if he wore a bandage or something like that, so Severus just did it. When the doctor left Severus turned the bandage into a black ribbon and it stayed that way. Sirius bought him some to change after they were soiled with potions and ointments, so that they would always be fresh.

Yes, he could have simply cleaned them with a spell, but he preferred them to smell of clean laundry.

When, on the first morning, he took the ribbon and tied it at the back of Severus' head, Severus received it with surprise, but not as much as when, one day, when he had not yet got out of bed, he suddenly woke up and realised that Sirius was combing his hair. Although he was blindfolded and did not speak, Sirius recognised it by the tension in his body and the sudden twitching. He immediately reassured him. "It's all right, I'm combing your hair."

After this Snape lay stiffly, completely immobile and submitted passively to the treatment. From then on he consciously allowed Sirius to take care of it. Every day he allowed Sirius to bathe him, give him medication and change his outfit.

It was a very intimate experience for Sirius, very private. It was almost as if they were a real couple, as if Severus trusted him. Everything was "almost", and this caused Sirius pain and some strange longing, a feeling he could not identify but which tormented him. All he knew was that he wanted "for real" and not "almost".

During the dressing procedures, Severus, as helpless as a doll, never asked why Sirius was doing it, and even if he had asked, Sirius would not have been able to answer the question. He himself did not know why he did it, but he felt that he wanted it, that he needed it, that he had to. And Severus let him, even though he could easily have done all these things himself. On top of that, he allowed him to move into his bedroom and sleep in the same bed with him, despite the fact that they currently were not having sex. Fortunately, the Ministry recognised something like illness of one or both spouses as an excuse for not completing these "formalities". Every time Sirius thought about it, he felt white-hot rage overwhelm him, such a violation of human rights provoked in him an objection.

One way or another, they would come back to it one day, Sirius hoped. When Severus felt like it again, of course. But that's later, it wasn't important, the most important thing now was Severus regaining his sight and speech.

His body was already much stronger than before, in fact everything but his sight and voice had returned to full functionality. Sirius surmised that this temporary disability was having more of an effect on his husband's mental state than he would like to show.

Currently, Severus spent his days at home, and Sirius with him. He knew he would have to return to work soon, but he always delayed it for a day or two. Not yet, now he has to make sure his husband doesn't accidentally hurt himself. That was lame excuse, even he himself did not believe in this possibility, but he still couldn't bring himself to leave him alone. It was too close to disaster.

Every day Severus lay on his bed and listened to the news read from the newspapers, walked to the dining hall for meals, moving quietly and efficiently, if it weren't for his cane of blindness one might have thought he could see. During meals his movements were much more cautious, and after once spilling soup on the table he asked the Elves to serve him only sandwiches. Sirius wanted to offer to help him eat, but preferred not to abuse Severus' patience. Then, after the meal he would go to the library and listen to books there. He didn't want to receive visitors, he was like a cat hiding when it was hurt. Self-sufficient and independent.

Today was no different.

Immediately after lunch Severus disappeared into the library, cutting himself off from the whole world. Sometimes he would fall asleep there and only Sirius would wake him up for another meal.

That day, for some reason, Sirius had an irresistible urge to watch him as he slept curled up in an armchair. He had never considered himself a guy who was moved by fragility and vulnerability, but apparently he was.

Not wanting to wake him, he soundlessly opened the door and froze in stillness. Sitting in the armchair, Severus wasn't sleeping; instead, he sat bent over, with his head lowered, his face covered by a curtain of shiny black hair, hidden in his hands, and judging by his shaky, shuddering breath, he was crying.

Sirius was afraid even to draw breath lest he be heard. He had witnessed something so very private, Severus would not forgive him such a violation of privacy. So he stood and watched his trembling back, listened to his quiet sobs and wails as, unaware that he was being watched, Severus openly gave vent to his emotions.

Finally, trying to move as quietly as possible, Sirius slipped out of the room, closed the door soundlessly and stood for a moment leaning against it, with his heart beating hard.

He saw something Severus would never want to show him. He had already suspected that some of the aloof behaviour was just appearances, but even so, seeing the truth was a shock.

Oh God, oh God, mused Sirius, what shall I do now? How do I approach him, now that I know how broken he is? It was difficult, bloody difficult.

Without thinking too long he decided to visit the Potters.

Moments later he was sitting with a glass of scotch in his hand next to Lily and James and recounting the incident to his friends. Harry was playing a little away on the carpet, the cat sleeping on the windowsill. An idyllic picture. The scene he had just witnessed contrasted all the more against this backdrop.

"I didn't expect him to actually cry. It's Severus, do you understand? Snape!" Sirius shook his head, as if the thought was something unimaginable.

James looked slightly embarrassed, it was hard to say whether by what he had heard about Severus or rather by Sirius' surprise.

Lily shook her head, as if she couldn't believe Sirius wasn't joking.

"Of course he's cried, I'm sure he's cried more than once, he's just as human as you or me after all."

They did not understand, they did not understand at all! Sirius shook his head. After all, this was Severus who never showed sadness even when they teased him as teenagers, never cried, not when they got married or when they argued and fought a few years ago. He always just snorted with contempt, with mockery, nothing could touch him. And now he was broken, and he was crying, and it was all so absurd, so damned out of place.

Terrified, heartbroken Severus... Sirius would never be able to forget that sight, he was sure, he would always have it before his eyes.

Sirius finished his drink and poured himself a new one.

"Jesus, it's one thing to suspect something, another to see it." He knew he was still very much violating Severus's privacy by saying this, but judged it necessary. Severus doesn't know about it, and he needs support.

"I don't suppose you expected him to really doesn't care?" Lily was of course right, that would be naïve.

Harry stood up from his toys and swaying slightly came closer. James picked him up and sat him

on his lap and Sirius reached out his hand to him and Harry smiled at him. Sirius looked at James "may I?", shifted the toddler into his lap and cuddled him close, letting Harry play with his long wavy hair.

He watched the toddler for a moment, then lifted his gaze to Lily.

"I don't know what I expected... I'd like to help him."

For a while he played with the child until it got bored and got out of his arms and returned to its previous place on the carpet. Since he had given him the medicine prepared by his Severus, the little one no longer had problems with a sore tummy.

His Severus? Sirius shook his head, what came to his mind! Alcohol is to blame, he judged and drank another glass to the end.

His Severus.

His.

Once thought, the words came back like a boomerang, Sirius's mind kept returning to them, turning them on all sides, testing how they lay on his tongue. He liked the way they sounded. He wouldn't mind having the power to say them out loud.

When he returned Severus was already lying in bed, on his side, probably asleep. Sirius undressed and carefully laid down beside him, facing him.

Severus's body was warm and soft, tempting to touch so Sirius tried to hold him close, but then it became apparent that Severus was awake. He moved away violently, taking Sirius' hands off him, and rolled with his back to him, hissing 'don't'.

Huh... That didn't go over well, and he only wanted to show him support.

"Severus..." Sirius spooned behind him and embraced him again. He felt his body stiffen against him; Snape's displeasure was almost palpable.

"What?" He hissed, still trying to avoid speaking.

Sirius kissed his neck and pretended not to notice how Severus twitched with dislike. "Severus...

Do not run from me." Sirius was drunk, and therefore less mindful of appearances. "I miss you."

He kissed the sharp edge of his lean shoulder. "Let me hug you, that's all I ask." His arm tightened tighter around his husband's narrow waist, under his hand feeling his belly ripple slightly from his breaths. He was so thin, so petite, Sirius thought to himself, running his fingers over his protruding ribs, he was half of him.

Severus lay in silence for a moment, motionless, and Sirius plunged his face into his hair, inhaling the scent of herbs. Long gone are the days when he used to call them oily out of spite. Now he really liked the fact that they were so shiny.

"You want to fuck me, that's the point, isn't it?" Severus clearly did not believe his pure intentions.

"Forget about it. Not when you're drunk as a pig."

Finally, whole sentences! Sirius rejoiced as if he had heard a declaration of love. But no, that was wrong.

"Shh! Don't speak." He put his finger to his lips and nearly got hit in the nose in the process when Severus tried to move away. "No, I just want to hold you in my arms, nothing more. I was so worried..."

Sirius felt a piece of ribbon tissue under his cheek and it made him tear up a bit. His tongue was starting to tangle, the alcohol was hitting his head even harder, knocking down all barriers. "You are so strong, so amazing, so beautiful.... I miss seeing your black eyes, they are deeper than the deepest pools. You could drown in them...I want you, I need you, not just your body. Let me have you, Severus, please. "

Sirius was not even aware that he was saying anything, let alone what he was saying. He might as well have just been thinking about it, cradling this reluctant body to himself. "Severus, Severus...please." He spoke again, this time more consciously, although he did not know what he was asking for. Not that it makes any difference.

Severus lay very stiffly in his arms, and did not react in any way, Sirius was not even sure he had heard his words. Maybe it's for the best...Anyway, he was too sleepy, too drunk to think about it right now. He ran his hand over his husband warm belly once more, moving his hand until it came to rest on Severus' chest, at the level of his heart, snuggled his face into his neck and fell into a strong, alcoholic sleep.

In the morning, when he woke up in an empty bed, he remembered nothing of what he had said.

But Severus apparently did remember something, because in the evening, just after his bath, while Sirius was combing his hair, he suddenly spoke up.

"Do you want to fuck me?" It was still a whisper, but what a whisper!

Standing at his side, Sirius ran the brush once more through his long to mid-back shining hair.

"Yes, of course I want to. What kind of question is that?"

Severus lifted his head and tilted it in his direction. "Do it then."

Oh! To such a direct invitation, Sirius could not refuse. He set the brush aside and dived towards Severus, sealing his lips with a deep kiss. When he finally pulled away and stood in front of Severus his husband raised his hands towards his chest so Sirius grasped them and drew them close. For a moment, his hands rested still, then they began to move, reacquainting themselves with Sirius' body, gently, exploring the hard muscles in a way they had not done before.

Sirius tried to imagine what Severus was feeling. The large muscular chest, the hard, muscular belly with a thin strip of hair going down, the powerful, broad shoulders. Did Severus like this? Sirius did not know; Severus had never said anything to him about his sexuality or taste. As for the former, Sirius knew that he was at least bisexual, like him, but he knew nothing about the latter. It is possible that Severus approached him with such apparent aversion because he found him physically unattractive and only what they did in bed appealed to him. Sirius didn't know that, didn't know anything. Severus was like a closed book, whose hard, impenetrable cover jealously guarded its secrets.

Suddenly Sirius twitched, the touch of moist, warm lips around his cock brought him back to reality. He looked down and saw his husband's cheeks hollowed around half of his dick. Severus didn't do this very often, so Sirius appreciated it all the more now. He let it go on for a moment and then pulled away from him with slight regret. "That is enough."

Severus sat naked in front of him, with his thighs open, his moist swollen lips parted and breathing heavily. So completely different from what he used to be, confident, unafraid, naturally sexy. Even blind, with a ribbon around his head, he didn't appear weak or eliciting sympathy. Oh no, he was anything but that.

Sirius closed his eyes; this sight would have been enough for him to come at once.

When he had calmed down a little, he lifted Severus by the waist and laid him further on the bed.

This time when he finally entered him, Severus put his arms around his neck and held on tight, and whimpered right into his ear as he was fucked into the mattress.

For some reason Sirius had more of a feeling that something was different, it was more like love making than fucking, as they usually did.

1983.05 Severus

Severus was mortified by what he heard that night. He knew he wasn't supposed to pay attention to a drunken man's meaningless talk, so he tried to forget what he'd heard as quickly as possible. But the touch of his hard body against his own reminded him that he was a sexual being, a young man and had his own needs. Since that night, they had resumed regular sex. Severus did not understand why he had once found it unpleasant! It was so addictive.

Each time, Severus tried to concentrate on the small details. When he was deprived of his sight, his senses became clearer.

When he didn't see him, everything was different. Severus forgot that it was Sirius, he was becoming a different person that Severus was getting to know all over again. He was a human being, even though for so many years Severus had tried not to remember that.

No great revolutionary changes were needed for this, sometimes it was a matter of seeing the human in someone else that mattered most. This process was definitely not painless, it was difficult to admit to oneself that one had deliberately closed the way to an agreement, had rejected this possibility, and that the other side kept trying and trying.

Until now, Severus had been very defensive about this, not wanting to risk his feelings, but now, against his reason, something in his strong will broke and he began to see the world with new eyes, like a butterfly that had emerged from a chrysalis, born anew.

And he suddenly felt as if he had met Sirius for the first time. Everything was new.

His voice, his touch, the way he walked. His passion, his gentleness, his protective instinct, soft touches, gentle caresses. His tenderness, his care. His willingness to give. In bed, he always made sure Severus came first and usually more than once. Whenever Severus reached out for something, Sirius always tried to guess his wishes. As Severus walked, he could be absolutely certain that Sirius was nearby, watching him closely, ready at any moment to protect him, to hold him from falling.

And this zero aggression that Sirius lately displayed. Severus really must have been desperate and thirsty for contact with someone else, a sense of intimacy with someone, to even appreciate what should have been a granted thing, he judged with distaste.

This never-ending patience, not showing even the slightest sign of discomfort or boredom, being by his side and putting up with his changing moods, persevering, like a dog.

Sirius' hands touched him, undressed him, undid the buttons of his robe, each movement and gesture delicate, each filled with tenderness. He couldn't hide the fact that his touch made Severus feel more grounded, gave him a sense of security now that his world had turned black.

They were large, broad, slightly rough and calloused and very strong, yet, so carefully and gently were touching Severus as if he were made of the finest porcelain, as if a stronger touch could make him fall apart.

The body. Warm, breathing, simultaneously firm and yielding under pressure. Muscles, tendons, bones, blood. A body similar to those he had assisted in dissecting during his medical lessons. The same as his own, yet different. Equally susceptible to diseases, injuries, and death.

Of course, internally, beneath the skin, everyone looks roughly the same. Both he and Sirius. Huh, it wasn't an appropriate moment to think about matters such as death and mortality, but on the other

hand, it was. Severus was so close to death once again, following the incident with the werewolf. Now he couldn't separate life from death even if he tried; both sides were so close, barely an inch apart.

Severus was certain that Sirius wouldn't appreciate his line of thinking, but that's just how Severus was.

He traced the texture of Sirius' skin with his fingers, familiarizing himself with the map of his body. An ordinary body of a living human, and yet not ordinary because it belonged to Sirius. The only living body, besides his own, that he had seen naked, that he had touched. And Sirius was the only person who saw and touched his body. It made their sexual encounters something very unique, special in Severus's eyes. It was their privilege, their right.

The smell of Sirius. His cologne, his clove cigarettes, the natural smell of his skin, the smell of his shampoo and the smell of his leather jacket.

And the smell of his sweat after sex, mixed with the scent of Severus.

It all formed a whole, his unique scent, his own olfactory note that Severus recognised immediately.

His breath on Severus' skin, eliciting goosebumps.

The five o'clock shadow on his face that scratched Severus' face. Severus, being pragmatic, had already been using a potion that caused no stubble to grow for a dozen years, washed his face with it every day and never had to bother with shaving his face. He wasn't good at looking after himself, and was annoyed by having to repeat the same treatments over and over again.

Sirius, on the other hand, clearly liked not being smoothly shaved. Severus didn't mind, and sometimes when he thought about the fact that under his long robe he had abrasions from it on his thighs and buttocks he felt excited and strangely indecent.

All of this was foreign and new despite the fact that it had surely appeared many times before, only he hadn't noticed it.

He decided to concentrate more on what he was hearing than on his feelings towards him.

So he listened. At first he was confused by the multitude of noises he heard, noises he had never noticed before. Did the floor really always creak like that? Did the wind always blow so loudly?

Somewhere in the depths of the house, doors were opening and closing, a clock was chiming.

Sounds were attacking from every direction.

With time, he became accustomed to them and began to catch the most important ones by ear.

And Sirius' voice, soft, filled with emotion, sometimes too loud when he was excited about something, but more often muffled and filled with worry when he said his name.

Soon, Severus favourite sound became Sirius' heartbeat pounding through his chest, something familiar and reassuring. It became Severus' favourite lullaby when he couldn't fall asleep at night.

All he had to do was rest his head against his chest or press his face against it, and the rhythmic, reliable sound would make Severus drift off to sleep.

The next day Sirius returned to work and they no longer spent whole days together. At last. It didn't bother him in itself, but it took away from the time he could have spent planning.

Now he could finally spend hours sitting or pacing around the room, recalling everything he had

read about eyes in his medical and magical books, every tiny piece of knowledge, without worrying that someone would distract him with a word. From time to time, wanting to make sure he remembered correctly, he would summon a chosen book from his private library and verify his knowledge.

When Severus wasn't listening to books or trying to develop the most effective potions, he would lie in bed or sit in his armchair, contemplating his relationship with Sirius—essentially, that was all he could do. Or worry, of course. So he chose contemplation.

Each morning Severus would take off the tangled ribbon, open his eyes and look before tying it back around his head. His sight was no doubt returning, but too slowly for his liking.

He could see the light clearly, but everything else had blurred outlines and merged together, like a world viewed through frosted glass.

Severus struggled with this, blinking in an attempt to remove the nonexistent obstacle from his eyes and straining his vision. He had to do something about it.

He decided to take matters into his own hands and not just passively wait.

Of course, he could ask for help from others, but the fewer people who knew about his condition the better, plus Severus remembered that Sirius was an excellent student, so he should be just as suited to the task as Lily, for example.

Yes, he had confidence in Sirius' abilities.

Not so long ago he would not have trusted him in this matter, but now he could - if Sirius had wanted him to get hurt or to get rid of him, he simply would not have helped him, that would have solved the whole situation. But he did, and Severus had no reason to distrust him further in terms of his safety.

The fleeting touches, the attempts to hug him and the 'how are you feeling' question said a lot more to Severus than anything they had done together since that 'reconciliation'.

Black really did care for him. That was a fact.

How this had happened, when this change had occurred Severus did not know. But it had happened.

And since he already knew this, he decided to make use of this knowledge.

As soon as Sirius returned home that afternoon, Severus immediately approached him before he could get drunk. He had specifically waited for him, not wanting to put it off, there was no point in taking any chances, Sirius was ready to go straight to the Potters and return in the middle of the night.

"Ah, Severus!" Surprise and joy rang in Black's voice. Severus extended his hand towards him and Sirius immediately seized it. The touch of his warm skin and strong hand was very reassuring.

Suddenly a thought must have crossed Sirius' mind because he no longer sounded so happy when

he asked "did something happen?" His other hand found its way to Severus' shoulder and held him gently.

Severus quickly shook his head. "No, I'm fine." Not so long ago Severus would have wondered whether Sirius was pitying him or genuinely worried and now he simply knew it. After Sirius had changed, apparently he had changed too. But this is not surprising, after all, it was Sirius who dictated the terms of their relationship from the beginning, it was he who imposed the tone. All the hatred came from him, not from Severus. Severus simply treated others as he was treated by them. Oh well.

"I have a request for you. Would you help me prepare a cure for my eyes?" His voice was still not much louder than a whisper and Severus felt Sirius move close to him, leaning his head towards him so that he could feel his breath on his lips.

Again, the joy but also slight surprise appeared in Sirius' voice. "Of course, if I can do it. When?" Severus felt one of his hands on his cheek. He bit his lip slightly; it was too overwhelming, all the affectionate gestures with which Sirius flooded him.

"What do you say about now? After you've eaten something, of course." He added quickly. He didn't know when they had started talking to each other differently but they had. Suddenly there were ordinary domestic conversations in their lives and it became so normal. He wouldn't mind if it stayed that way. Earlier Severus would not have wondered if Sirius had eaten dinner, now he did. Nor would he extend his hand towards him in greeting, seeking contact with him. And before that, Sirius would not have been inclined to help Severus with anything and would not have touched him so affectionately. It had become so natural.

"Sounds good to me. I'll be quick." Sirius kissed him quickly on the lips and ran. Severus was sure he was smiling when he said it.

He stood still for a moment and then only a little slower than usual moved to the living room where he listened to the book while waiting for Black.

Sirius must indeed have been in a hurry, for Severus felt that he had barely started listening and Sirius had already finished his meal. This eagerness slightly amused him on the one hand and perplexed him on the other.

They used the Floo and soon Severus was instructing Sirius what to give him, where it stands, on which shelf and in which jar. The window had already been repaired, Sirius had probably personally taken care of it, and the floor was clean, with not a trace of potion residue or vomit on it. Severus sniffed but the room smelled only of cleanliness and small traces of magic, it was again sterile as it should be.

Not being able to afford to make a mistake, he took his time instructing Sirius what to take out and from where, and Sirius read the name written on the label just in case, to make sure it was definitely the right ingredient. When all the ingredients were finally prepared, it was time for the most difficult and risky moment - measuring the doses. The smallest mistake could lead to permanent disability. Sirius must have known this, too, because he approached it very seriously and meticulously. He washed his hands thoroughly, put on Severus' apron and tied his hair into a ponytail, they didn't need any stray hairs accidentally added to the medication.

He did not joke, he did not tease Severus, he measured out ingredient by ingredient with the utmost concentration and precision while Severus gave the instructions.

In the past, Severus would never have believed that he would have trusted Black to this extent, and yet he did. Strangely enough life worked out.

When everything was measured and ready to be mixed and mashed, Severus took the bowl from Sirius, intent on doing it himself. It was the first time he had been in his laboratory since the accident, almost a month and a half ago. He could not see anything, of course, but the atmosphere of the room was different, less favourable, but maybe it was only him who perceived it that way. Quickly shaking off the bad memories, he set to work.

Severus grated it carefully, as if his life depended on it. Well, it did.

From time to time he checked the consistency with his finger, while Sirius stood behind his back and looked over his shoulder. At last the ointment was ready. If this didn't help him, nothing would. Severus wasn't particularly modest about it, he knew that if he wasn't the best he was among the best potion masters, plus his knowledge of medicine certainly didn't hurt.

For the last time, Severus lifted the bowl and smelled the semi-liquid contents before declaring "done."

"Can I do that?" Sirius touched the ribbon girdling Severus' head. Severus nodded.

Sirius untied the ribbon, took it off, wound it around his hand and tucked it into the pocket of his jeans, from the other he pulled out a silk bag of clean ribbons.

"What now?" His voice sounded very strained, he was clearly nervous.

Severus, with feigned nonchalance, shrugged his shoulders. "Now I'm going to rub this on my eyes and repeat it for about two weeks. After that time, my sight should return." He did not add that he hoped it would, not that he was so sure and that he was terrified of the possibility that it might fail. He felt Sirius' hands on his shoulders stroking his body in circular motions. "You can't fail. Not you." Again that strange, overwhelming tenderness. Severus was glad Sirius hadn't said such things earlier, as it might have affected his concentration.

"Yes." He nodded, searched for the pipette and when he found it he scooped the medicine into it and sprinkled each eye in turn and then massaged the substance through his eyelids with circular motions of his fingers. With a slightly shuddering sigh, he put the empty pipette back on the table and propped himself up with his arms.

"Severus..." Sirius gently turned him to face him and hugged him to his chest. Shocked by the gesture, Severus stood still for the first few seconds and then allowed himself to be comforted and rested his face on his shoulder. He felt like crying, he felt so mentally weary, so burdened by fear for his health. But, of course, he didn't cry.

One of Sirius' hands smoothed his back between his shoulder blades in a reassuring gesture, the other rested on his waist. Severus didn't know how long they stood like that, only moving away a little when his heart stopped pounding like mad and his breathing calmed. It was only natural that Sirius held his jaw and kissed him and Severus' arms wrapped around his shoulders.

After a few moments, consciousness returned in Severus and he pulled away violently. What was he doing? They were behaving like a pair of lovers, on top of which he was just as affected as Sirius.

Even if Sirius noticed his behaviour he showed nothing of himself. "May I tie a new ribbon?" Severus nodded. "Yes, of course." For some reason he was blushing, he could feel it on his face. What an absurd situation! It wasn't the first time they had kissed, so why did he feel that way? He felt the touch of the fabric on his face as Sirius covered his eyes.

"Does it look very bad?" Severus decided to change the mood of the moment. Up to this point, he had pretended to be completely uninterested in his appearance, so he tried to say it in a light tone, so that it came off more as a mockery than a genuine question.

Sirius' hand brushed a strand of hair away from Severus' face, caressing his cheek in the process.

"No, it doesn't look very bad. The whites of your eyes are red, but your eyelids are a normal colour." Severus smiled faintly.

Sirius lifted his chin with his hand, as if Severus could look him in the eye. "Shall we celebrate this?"

Severus knew he should move away but still stood still and let himself be held. "How?" He blushed again, painfully aware that Sirius was now watching his face and no detail beyond his eyes could go unseen. He must have looked ridiculous and grotesque as he stood there like that with his face red. If only he could stop blushing, Severus was angry with himself. What has become of him! Since when does he care about such things? He became even more angry.

Sirius laughed. "I don't know, why don't we go for ice cream or a picnic?" Apparently he hadn't noticed his husband's moral dilemmas. And very well, too.

"Another time." Severus considered the suggestion and decided that he didn't want to show himself in public like this to avoid arousing pity.

Who knows, maybe someone would recognise him and take a picture of him, which would then adorn the cover of The Daily Prophet in a dubious manner.

Not wanting to completely disappoint Sirius he quickly added "Now we can go to bed."

Despite not seeing him, Severus sensed Sirius' disappointment. He hesitated.

Severus was stunned. Since when did sex stop being the most important thing to Sirius? He didn't really prefer going out for ice cream, did he?

Sirius was trying to be kind, what had it cost him to return the kindness?

"These are the plans we'll return to when I regain my sight, okay?" He didn't know what pushed him to justify himself to him. It was another matter, beyond belief, that the offer of sex disappointed Sirius. Who would have thought it would come to this!

"Will you help me pour the medicine into this blue jar?" He pointed to where it should more or less stand on the shelf.

"Oh, of course." After a moment Severus heard the sounds of opening, pouring and capping and then Sirius lifted Severus' hand and handed him the jar.

"Thank you." Severus tucked it into his robe pocket.

Some time later, as they lay relaxed after sex and Severus felt as if he didn't have a single bone in his body. He felt very relaxed and satiated, worries gone to the furthest point of his mind. He was slowly drifting off into sleep when Sirius' voice called him back. "Will you tell me what the potion was?"

Still not fully awake, Severus did not immediately understand what was being talked about.

"Ummm?" Out of habit, he turned his face towards Sirius, as if to see him.

"The one you were working on then." There was a clear tone of concern in Sirius' voice, which Severus' now-sensitive hearing picked up clearly.

"Ah. For seeing in the dark. I'll have to go over the dosages again and find what went wrong."

His voice was still not back to normal and sounded a bit hoarse, but it was already a matter of days, maybe weeks, as the vocal cords were healing nicely.

"What, are you going to do it again?" Disbelief rang in Sirius' voice.

"Of course, why wouldn't I?" Severus didn't quite understand what Sirius meant, why his surprise. It was probably obvious that a product takes so long to improve until it works flawlessly? After all, he was a scientist, someone who invents potions and spells and not someone who merely repeats them after someone else has created them. It was obvious that results are achieved by trial and error.

Or at least it was obvious to Severus, as Sirius seemed surprised by it.

Silence fell.

Finally, clearly Sirius could not stand it.

"So you are going to do this even after it nearly killed you and almost made you blind and mute?!" His voice was filled with barely contained rage.

Severus momentarily froze surprised by this sudden display of aggression.

"Have you gone completely mad? Do you want to kill yourself? Do you care so little for your life?" Sirius spoke louder and louder, he was on the verge of screaming.

Severus felt Sirius shift on the bed, closer to him, leaning so low that he was almost touching him. He twitched violently, trying to dodge him. He didn't like the situation, he felt a growing sense of danger. The enraged Black was very dangerous, very violent, as Severus had seen more than once, and he could easily hurt him now. He could feel the panic rising, his heart was beating very fast, his breathing had become shallower, he had probably also gone pale. All the past came back suddenly and fell heavily on him, the ferocity and aggression of Sirius, and his own helplessness and terror, he felt his throat tighten, making it impossible for him to get a word out. In his ears he could hear the humming of his pulse, drowning out Sirius' voice.

He was now much more vulnerable than ever, his wand lying on the bedside table, and he unsure if he could find it right away and if he wouldn't accidentally knock it to the floor. He automatically turned his face in that direction, trying to see it. His body tensed, ready to flee blindly in the direction he knew the door was, if Sirius would give him enough time to do so of course.

"Severus?" Sirius' hand touched his cheek and turned his face towards himself. Before he could stop himself, Severus flinched at the touch and stiffened all over. His breathing had now accelerated even more, Severus was aware that he was hyperventilating.

All the carefreeness he'd had in Black's company evaporated, they reverted to their old relationship.

"Severus, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to shout. Jesus, I'm sorry, that must have sounded really bad, didn't it?" Sirius' voice was much quieter now, with a distinct sense of guilt. Severus let out a breath he hadn't even known he'd been holding since Black touched his face. "I'm very worried about you. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you. I'm sorry again, I shouldn't have shouted, I'm an idiot." He was speaking quickly now, softly, with fervour. He let go of Severus' face and instead lifted his hand and kissed the inside of his wrist. "I'm sorry."

Severus lay, breathing more deeply now, not knowing what to think about what had happened, recovering for a few minutes, allowing his heart to slow down, waiting for his body to return to normal functioning and for the rush of thoughts to pass.

He needed to think clearly.

He shouldn't have panicked so quickly, he chastised himself in his thoughts. He was revealing too much of himself to Sirius, but over time, he found it increasingly difficult to maintain a mask of indifference in such situations. Severus feared that in the not-too-distant future, he would start reacting to distress with tears, and that would be unbearable. Perhaps he should visit a psychologist

again, but because they had to conceal the nature of their relationship, he felt as if his hands were tied. How could she help him if he couldn't articulate what the problem was? He returned to his thoughts on what he had heard.

Sirius was apologising to him. He was apologising to him so simply, it wasn't mockery or teasing, it seemed like a sincere apology. What happened, since when did he start treating him like a human being?

"Are you worried about me? I don't understand." Severus whispered. "Why?" You hate me, he wanted to add but didn't. It would be showing his weakness, his feelings, as if he cared.

Again he felt Sirius' hand caressing his cheek, this time he did not move away. The moment of weakness passed, he regained his composure. Once again he was not afraid.

"Oh, Severus, in every matter you are so intelligent but this one. It's been a long time since I've hated you." Sirius leaned over him again, his warm breath touching his lips. He was really close, but this time Severus didn't feel trapped. "Yes, I worry about you, I care about you. Why? Because I like you. I've grown accustomed to your presence, I've come to know your character, and I like what I've discovered."

Severus listened shocked. This time Sirius was sober.

"I also like your beauty. I bloody love it." Apparently Sirius felt more confident making such confessions when Severus couldn't see him. It gave him the courage to say something like that.

"Did you just..." Severus hesitated again, unsure how to say it. First this emotional outburst and now this, he didn't know what to make of it.

A moment later, Sirius' soft but confident-sounding voice reached him. "I am making a confession to you. Yes, that's what I'm doing."

1983.05 Sirius

Chapter Summary

We are slowly approaching the end, so the action slows down a lot, now there will be mainly an attempt to build a relationship and connection between Severus and Sirius.

I hope it does not get too boring.

Oh, shit, he said it, he said it! It happened. Sirius felt a mixture of horror and relief. Finally it happened. With this confession he surprised not only Severus but himself as well. He didn't plan it before, he just followed his feelings, let them guide him.

It hadn't gone too badly, Severus hadn't laughed at him. Yes, he fell silent, his cheeks flushed and he was visibly embarrassed, but that was expected. And then he asked him for time to think about it.

Later, Sirius took him again, and Severus was again soft and laying in his arms and silently screaming into his ear as he experienced pleasure. His moaning and whimpering was the most beautiful melody in Sirius' ears, he wanted to listen to it all the time. Snape was so rarely so open, so rarely showed his feelings.

The awful moment when he was so clearly terrified when Sirius started screaming at him was gone.

The skinny, petite man moving away from him, panicked in his blindness, with a tense, stressed body. It had all gone wrong, not the way Sirius wanted it to, he was after all only worried so why didn't Snape listen to his words?

At first Sirius did not realise what had happened when Severus twitched under his touch and tried to escape. Then it dawned on him. He shouted, it was his shouting that had such an effect on his husband.

It had been a long time since Severus had been like this around him, he had been so casual for a long time, so this sudden change shocked him greatly, Sirius had grown unaccustomed to this terrified Severus.

Fortunately, it was fine now, a warm relaxed body melting into his own, responding to every touch, every caress. Sirius tried to reward him for his recent stress with extra tenderness, and Severus, while riding him, took it and gave it back, marking Sirius' neck and nape with kisses and light bites that Sirius hoped would leave a mark on his skin tomorrow. The view was so damn mesmerising, fascinating, his slender serpentine body moving fluidly, up and down, his hips making circles, his hair falling in a curtain with every movement he made, and the black ribbon around his eyes making the view more mysterious and obscene, while Severus supported himself on his shoulders.

Sirius felt like locking him in his arms and never letting him go.

It was almost what he craved, this closeness, tenderness, someone he could call his own. He knew Severus trusted him, or at least trusted him until now because it was with him that he went to make his medicine. He was the one he had asked for help, and he could have chosen anyone else. Lily would have been the more obvious choice, or this Mr. Seamus of his. But Severus chose him! The

happiness he felt at that moment was indescribable. He had the feeling that he had succeeded in achieving a goal that he did not even know he was looking for.

Without thinking long, Sirius drew him close by the waist, until Severus let out a squeal of surprise and kissed him passionately, deeply, trying to express all his longings with this kiss.

After just a few days Severus' ointment treatment proved very effective, what Sirius thought was obvious and certain, but to be more certain he waited two weeks before he removed the ribbon from his eyes.

The sight of his black, almond-shaped, slightly slanted eyes looking sharply straight at him made Sirius feel a strange tightening of the heart. He felt like grabbing him in his arms and kissing him on the face, each eye individually, then the cheekbones and ending the journey on the lips, and so he did, and Severus let him. He kissed him, smiling every now and then, not hiding his joy that his husband had fully recovered his sight, that all was well, and those bottomless eyes watched him intently and as if surprised. As a precaution, for the first week or two they decided to give up intense lighting so that his eyes had time to get used to the light again.

So many times he feared that nothing would come of it, that his husband had been crippled for life. Slowly, he began to plan the improvements he could make in the house to make it easier for a blind person to get around, he considered giving up his job to be there for him. But now it was no longer necessary, Severus was healthy!

During this time, they did not return the conversation to Sirius' confession, he judged that Severus needed time to assess the situation and decide if he wanted to change their relationship. This was normal, rushing someone would only hurt.

It was surprising that it seemed at all Severus was considering some form of relationship with him, that he was thinking about it. They were so different from each other, he would have lived the Muggle life 100% if he could, Severus was 100% in the Wizarding World, they were like a clash between the Middle Ages and the 20th century. But it's possible that underneath these differences there was a plane that united them. No matter what century one is in or from what country, loneliness is always felt the same, Sirius judged.

He wondered if Severus also sometimes lay awake at night, with a heavy heart, and felt such a damn great need for something, someone, he didn't know who, but someone he would love, and he saw time passing, running away so fast, getting faster and faster, and him going round and round in circles, panicking and trying to get hold of someone, to cry "love me, love me, please," before it was too late. Life was not a fairy tale, at the end of the road of loneliness did not await the lover promised to them by fate. There, only death awaits and for this there is no need to rush, whatever happens, this one thing is guaranteed.

In the place of either of them could have been anyone, they both needed to kill their loneliness, that's all. But it was them, and that was all that mattered. Only this. Why shouldn't they try to make it something worthwhile? He certainly intended to, he just didn't know what Snape thought of it. Judging by the fact that he trusted him with something so incredibly important, and by the way his body relaxed under his touch - things that were 100% opposite to how their relationship had looked in the beginning, Sirius had to admit that they had come a long way.

Sirius very much didn't want this to change, he wanted to maintain this still fragile situation and develop it.

People built relationships on much more fragile foundations than this. Arranged marriages, for example, where partners met shortly before their wedding. And yet, such marriages could be happy; unfamiliarity turned into love, uncertainty into a sense of security. They at least knew each other beforehand, albeit not having a good relationship, to put it mildly, but they knew what to expect. Now they were slowly getting to know each other, learning to live together.

It was funny, if someone had told him six years ago that he would seek a romantic relationship with Snape, Sirius would have killed him with a laugh. And now he wanted it, just like that. Although "wanted" was not the right word. He needed it. His life had grown around Severus' life like moss overgrows a tree, clinging to it inextricably, or at least it would not have been without losses during their eventual separation from each other. For the moss, of course, there would be greater losses, Sirius knew this. He knew that he needed Severus more than Severus needed him. It was just the way it was, there was no point in fighting it. He already knew that what he felt was more than friendship. Severus was unlikely to reciprocate it. But perhaps that would change in time, Sirius thought.

The next day, after Severus had permanently removed the ribbon from his eyes, Sirius quizzed him over breakfast. The fragrance and beauty of the roses standing in several vases on the table seemed a fitting backdrop for this type of conversation.

Having breakfast together with Severus had always been his guilty pleasure, even when he despised him. For some reason, he felt a strange need, an impulse, perhaps it helped him acknowledge that their marriage truly existed. It used to be a nightmare back then, but now it was a symbol of hope.

Sirius discreetly watched as Severus ate his oatmeal, with concentration, as if it were something very important. He did everything that way, something Sirius had noticed long ago, but back then he considered it a flaw, whereas now it touched his heart. He was probably delighted with his restored vision, which was why he stared so fascinated at the dates and figs he scooped up with his spoon. Severus had quite an original taste when it came to choosing breakfast, but it was surely based on a logical explanation. Perhaps more than the taste, which Sirius believed must be good, the nutritional values were what mattered to Severus, the ones he deemed suitable for himself, because that was his style.

Sirius had already finished his scones and most of his breakfast; now he simply reached for fruits from time to time. He waited until Severus finished and reached for his coffee before capturing his attention.

"Remember you promised me a date?"

Severus froze with his coffee cup raised halfway and immediately turned crimson.

"Are you talking about this celebration? Going out for ice cream or a picnic?" Although he tried to speak in an impassive tone and with a serious face, his gaze fled slightly to the side.

A flustered Severus was not a common sight so Sirius tried to satiate his eyes with this rare treat.

"Yes, if you agree. I would like to take you on a date."

He deliberately repeated 'date' only to see Severus drop his gaze for a moment.

For a moment, Severus gathered his strength to continue the conversation, clearly not feeling as comfortable in the topic. For Sirius, it was adorable!

Severus' lack of experience in being in relationships was now evident. "You know you don't have to, we're married."

He lifted his face towards him, and Sirius couldn't take his eyes off those black, shimmering eyes he had missed so much. The sunken cheeks beneath the sharp protrusion of cheekbones seemed deeper than before; Severus had apparently lost a few pounds since the accident, and somehow Sirius hadn't noticed it earlier. Stress was probably affecting his appetite.

He had the urge to rise from his seat and embrace Severus tightly, just to feel the warmth of his body and hear the beating of his heart. "But I want to. I want something with you for real, not because the Ministry has issued some directive. You don't have to agree if you need more time to think about it, unless you've already thought about it and the answer is 'no'." This time it was Sirius who spoke in an artificially light tone. He didn't think so, but there was always a small chance. Black eyes met light grey ones. Severus had already regained his confidence, or was faking it well. "A picnic sounds good." He sipped his coffee and continued with his breakfast. Sirius smiled broadly. So the answer is "yes!"

When Severus finished, he pushed the dishes away from him and the House Elves immediately picked them up.

"But not today. I have an appointment with Mr. Seamus for lunch after work." His gaze rested for a moment on the bouquet of cream roses standing on the table, and Sirius felt a growing irritation but he wasn't going to show it.

He knew there was nothing between them, but he wasn't sure if this guy wouldn't want to change that. He always greeted Severus a little too warmly for Sirius' taste. Plus those flowers and gifts he'd sent him during his convalescence, those letters.... Almost every day something new came from him. It was definitely getting on Sirius' nerves.

"Back to work so soon? Huh, well yes, you love it, good." He grunted. "Are you still going to work on that potion?" Remembering how Severus reacted to his previous display of concern for him, this time Sirius was exercising great self-control to avoid raising his voice.

Even if Severus feared another outburst of emotions from Sirius, he didn't show it. "No, maybe in a while." His voice sounded polite, without a hint of the sharpness that used to dominate it, and his body posture was relaxed. It gave hope that Severus had truly forgiven Sirius for his previous behavior.

Sirius nodded. He didn't know if Severus was just lying to him to reassure him or if he really wasn't going to for now. It was impossible for Sirius to check anyway; if he was lying, Sirius hoped he would be more careful. He looked at his slim face with sunken cheeks and sharply protruding cheekbones, still adorned with blush, androgynous in its own way, and felt like keeping him home with him, even by force. This, of course, was an absurd thought, so he immediately abandoned it.

Instead, he stood up and walked over to Severus, all the while keeping a watchful eye on him, leaned against his chair and watched as his husband's narrow lips parted slightly and smouldering black eyes focused on his mouth. As he dipped his hand into Severus' long, slippery hair and crouched down for a coffee-scented, tenderness-filled kiss, he knew that yes, there was definitely a chance for them.

A few days later, at the weekend, they went on a picnic. Sirius had chosen a secluded spot in a small grove by the lake, on the grounds of the Black' country estate, where their wedding had taken place. They were there together for the first time in five years, because Severus never had the time or inclination to visit, and Sirius was not particularly eager to do so either. He, of course, was there from time to time, especially when he knew that his family would not be there.

Even though they lived and slept together, they got to know each other anew, and Sirius noticed that this time Severus had really decided to mend their relationship and not just agree to it for the sake of it. So they did this strange dance around each other of shy glances and exaggeratedly casual tone of questions asked.

They talked about favourite books, places, holidays, taking turns asking each other about all sorts of things, nice and polite conversations, some charming banalities but Severus was still reserved, seemed closed off, everything he said was what he wanted to show the world, not how he really was. Sirius knew that this was his defence mechanism, the less he exposed himself, the more power he had and the less others could hurt him. Others like him or James, long ago. The thought caused Sirius's cheeks to flush with shame, and waves of guilt and embarrassment tightened his throat, causing a pain in his chest. Oh, what a thoughtless, arrogant, aggressive idiot he had been back then!

Oh yes, Sirius was definitely not proud of it.

Well, he was young and foolish, filled with conviction of his rightness and self-confidence.

But that was all in the past, years ago. Sirius believed that he had changed a lot since then, and he hoped that Severus would eventually notice it. Of course, he was far from perfect and would never be, always a collection of many flaws, but nevertheless, he had come a long way from his former self.

Severus was probably still a little afraid of being hurt, maybe afraid of being laughed at too, and rightly so, considering his experiences from his teenage years, it was understandable, no one could blame him for that but Sirius thought he wanted to try anyway, he WAS trying, that's why he was here with him, and Sirius was grateful to him for that.

The real turning point, according to Sirius, came when he reached for the bottle of wine he had taken on the picnic and Severus then immediately became sullen. Sirius stopped in mid-motion and looked questioningly.

Severus bit his lower lip, hesitating before answering. Finally apparently making up his mind, he drew a deep breath to give himself strength.

"Don't drink, I hate it when you do that."

This was something new, something real. Sirius corked the bottle again and set it down. "Don't you like it when I'm drunk? Or do you not like it when I drink at all?"

Severus looked him in the eye, once Sirius would have found it defiant, now he found this demonstrative confidence defensive.

"Both."

Sirius nodded his head. It was an incredibly important moment, Severus talking to him for real, for the first time in his life. He didn't dismiss him with half-words, he opened up to him, trusted him.

Sirius decided to take a chance and try to find out more. "What else do you hate?"

The answer came immediately, he didn't even have to think about it.

"Cigarettes."

Sirius wanted to ask why, but since Severus hadn't said it himself, he didn't want to scare him

away. He guessed it had something to do with Severus' father, many years ago Lily had said the guy was a violent alcoholic. Plus Sirius still remembered that moment when, drunkenly, he threw himself at Severus and pinned him to the floor.

And then the look of Severus when Sirius finally realised Severus couldn't breathe, and got up off him, how much he was so dazed, letting Sirius hold him and sitting still in his arms when he never lets him do that, he was breathing super heavy and looked so scared.

How worried he was that he had hurt him. After that, everything went very wrong. This memory filled him with shame, and since then he has tried not to get too drunk too often and not too much. Ok, no more cigarettes or alcohol in Severus' company from now on, he decided.

Sirius was curious to see what else he could find out about his husband.

The question of Severus' parents intrigued him greatly. Their absence at the wedding, all those years of marriage, the lack of any contact that Sirius would have known about, they had not even appeared at any of Severus' author meetings. Obviously Sirius had tried to find out something about them.

"Will you tell me about your parents?" He tried. "Wouldn't you like to visit them sometime?"

The answer came immediately. "I'd rather not. That's the answer to both questions."

Hmmm, Severus quickly closed the subject. Still, Sirius decided to find out anything, even the smallest bit of information.

"You don't have the best relationship?"

Severus nodded solemnly.

"You could say that."

It wasn't the smartest of questions, that's for sure; anyone would have noticed that their relationship didn't exist. But why this was so, it troubled Sirius. "Even with your mother?"

Severus looked at him sternly. "Yes, Sirius, even with my mother. I think you know how it is."

"Yes, I do." Sirius reached out and took his hand in his own.

"Has your relationship with your parents always been so passive-aggressive?" This time it was Severus' turn to ask about his family.

Sirius shook his head. "No, not always. Our relationships have never been perfect, because that's hard to do with a group of temperamental people like us, but it hasn't been bad. It wasn't until that situation with Remus that changed everything." It wasn't a pleasant subject for either of them.

Severus became slightly tense, so Sirius decided not to pursue the subject, this was going to be a nice outing after all. Something was clearly wrong, his relationship with his parents must have been even worse than his own.

They stretched out more casually on the blanket, Severus lying on his side, Sirius sitting cross-legged. Although they did not speak for a while there was no awkward quiet. The air vibrated from the sounds made by insects, birds, or the rustling of the wind between the branches. Sirius loved this nook, when he was a child he often sought solitude here. He looked at his husband lying in the shade, his slender robe-clad figure stretched out before him, at his long hair and pale skin. He could easily imagine living with this sight before his eyes every day.

Severus studied his fingernails for a moment.

"Have you dated anyone before?" He reached for a strawberry from the fruit box standing in front of him and suddenly became very busy eating it.

"I've had various hookups, fleeting relationships, nothing serious." Sirius shrugged his shoulders.

"You know, we got married when we were both very young, so you understand, there wasn't much time for that."

Severus seemingly wasn't concentrating too much on what Sirius was saying, looking at the

ladybird that, possibly tempted by the smell of fruit, had landed on his hand, but Sirius knew he was listening to every word.

"Have you not dated or slept with other people during our marriage?" Ah, the nonchalance, the indifference in his voice, it was as if he was asking what Sirius had for breakfast and not anxiously expecting an answer. Sirius smiled, reached out and combed a strand of Severus's hair with his fingers, brushing his cheek in the process.

"Only with you."

Sirius wasn't sure if he wasn't imagining it or if a gentle smile actually appeared on Severus' lips for a moment. He himself didn't need to ask; he already knew the answer. He was the only person Severus had any kind of relationship or sexual contact with.

Severus picked up another strawberry and Sirius almost forcefully held back a smile. He was amused by Snape's methods for boosting his self-confidence.

Finally, a few strawberries later, Severus gathered his courage again.

"Who is Patti?"

Sirius opened his eyes wide. "Patti?"

"Yes, Patti. Who is she?" This time Severus sent him a look out of the corner of his eye and his voice sounds more harsh, accusatory, as if he had caught Sirius in a lie.

"She's my favourite singer." It was unbelievable, Severus was jealous! Ever since that time when they flew on the motorbike to meet the readers he had been thinking about it and wondering who Patti was! Sirius couldn't believe it, he was sure Severus had instantly forgotten everything they had talked about before, and here it was, a surprise. And yet he still hated him then, didn't he? Black eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Really?"

So this is what he was like when he was jealous! Suspicious, hiding his insecurities for months. It must have been draining, Sirius assessed. "Yes. I can play you something of hers."

Severus nodded and was silent for a moment, apparently deciding whether he believed it or not, and then - Sirius as much as had to close his eyes in order not to smile - he reached for another strawberry.

"What does she look like?"

Sirius raised an eyebrow.

"What does she look like? What kind of weird question is that?" He was well aware of why Severus was asking it, but decided not to show it. Since Severus hadn't mentioned those circumstances he wouldn't either. Apparently bringing it up would somehow make Severus feel worse. And why make the situation uncomfortable.

"If you must know, she is very thin and petite, with an oblong face and long black hair. She also has a large nose and a very fair complexion. She is very beautiful. And she reminds me of someone!" He smiled wider at Severus. "I would love to take you to her concert but she hasn't performed for years, what a pity."

Severus listened to this with his mouth open.

Just because Sirius intended to seduce Severus, did not mean that he would stop teasing him. "Why do you ask that?"

"Just like that, for no reason." He blushed slightly and lowered his gaze. "Show her to me."

A wide smile adorned Sirius's face. "Sure. When we get home, ok? I have pictures of her in my room."

"In your room?" Severus raised an eyebrow.

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. "In my old room. Since we've been married I've occupied the master

bedroom and I treat my old bedroom as my ...ummm... music room. That's where I usually listen to music." He added that last sentence entirely unnecessarily, but he was too excited to pay attention to such details.

Apparently, it hadn't crossed Severus's mind that Sirius hadn't always lived in that impersonal, "adult" room. He looked at Sirius with clear curiosity. "Intriguing! Can't wait to see it!"

In fact, they should move in together to the master bedroom. Sirius would have to bring up the topic and suggest it one day, he decided, there was no reason for it to remain unused.

After that, the dam that held them back burst open, and the questions flowed in a rapid stream—both the trivial and light-hearted ones, as well as the significant and serious ones. It seemed that at that moment, both of them wanted to know everything, to delve into each other in a single sitting, to fill in the gaps of years. Honesty was the key, and both of them understood that.

They haven't discussed sensitive topics yet; the time for that will come.

1983.05 Severus

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As Sirius had promised, when they returned home he led Severus to see Patti. Thus, six years after their marriage, Severus entered Sirius' childhood bedroom for the first time. The old room, as Sirius called it. The music room.

That place held memories of his husband's childhood. What was it like? Did he laugh and play here with his younger brother before they entered puberty and their paths diverged?

Certainly more prosperous than his own, that's for sure. Severus lived in a tiny, dark room with old furniture his father had brought from somewhere. They had neither hot water nor a bathroom in the house, and there was dampness on the walls which froze in winter and created patches of sparkling film on the wall. When Severus was very young, he enjoyed spending time gazing at the ice-crafted flowers and patterns that were created there. The same ones were always on the windows during winter, both in his own room and in the living room. The cold and frost would seep inside through the drafty wooden windows, with bits of putty falling off in places. At the time, Severus thought that was just how things were, that it always looked like that. He didn't realize until later that his family was poor.

The dampness in the house was so high that one day the floorboards in the living room rotted and caved in against one of the walls, and with them the cupboard standing there. The same threatened their shared wardrobe standing further away. When Severus returned from school the next day, the cupboard was no longer there and the wardrobe had been moved to the kitchen, where it remained until Severus moved out. The floor has not been repaired.

Severus remembered that he had always been cold, and now, despite his young age, he already had to prepare ointments for his aching joints. Sometimes he used magic to warm up his malnourished body, but he was often afraid to do so lest his father catch him doing it. He reacted very badly to even the slightest hint of magic and immediately became violent. The warmth was not worth the hours of arguing and screaming when the father was sober and beating him when he was drunk. All this Severus never intended to tell anyone, preferring to forget it.

Severus shook off the unpleasant memories. One thing was certain, Sirius certainly was never cold.

Sirius seemed slightly flustered and intimidated as he approached the door, but Severus wasn't sure if it wasn't just his imagination. An embarrassed Sirius? That's something new!

His spouse, after a second's hesitation, opened the door and entered the room first and waited for Severus who stopped in the threshold and looked around intently. It was like stepping into another reality, into the world of Muggles.

Or like being transported to the museum of Sirius' youth, where everything is stored as if in formalin, carrying scraps of the past, showing the private image of that rebellious teenager who tormented Severus at school.

It wasn't the most pleasant of associations, so he quickly redirected his attention elsewhere.

Severus stood at the door for a moment, his eyes scanning the room, discovering this new world for him for the first time. Everything here was so alien, out of place in this house, it completely didn't match the rest of the decor. Sirius's parents must have been very tolerant and accepting to allow him to arrange it that way.

For a brief moment, Severus expected the scent of teenage sweat, but in the air, there was a lingering smell of cleanliness. It couldn't be otherwise, as the house-elves diligently cleaned everywhere on a regular basis.

Finally, after completing the initial inspection from the doorway, he stepped inside and walked curiously to a bookcase occupying almost an entire wall, housing a huge collection of vinyl, a smaller collection of cassette tapes, on the table next to it stood his adapter and tape recorder, Sirius informed him. The vinyls and the adapter Severus knew, the other music-related equipment was unknown to him.

Against the other wall was a large bed, covered with black sheets, and next to it stood a small cupboard covered with music magazines, which also stood on the floor by the bed. The walls of the room were covered with posters, mostly of David Bowie from what Severus had read on the caption.

And girls in bikinis, tanned, blond, with puffed lips and half-closed eyes, contorted in various provocative poses, emphasizing their full breasts and round hips. Surprised, Severus turned his head and looked at Sirius. Well, no wonder he didn't show him this room!

"I hung these posters of girls specifically for my mom; she was really irritated by it. I never liked this type myself." Sirius smiled sheepishly.

Severus nodded his head. Huh, Sirius' parents were really understanding if he could deliberately tease them like that and have those posters still hanging on the wall. He himself knew that he would be severely punished for such behavior, and if he had done something like that, those posters would have been torn down and covered with something else faster than his bruises would fade from his blackened eyes. Severus wasn't sure who would yell louder, his father or mother. Sirius' parents definitely loved him very much, despite their currently strained relationship. He probably didn't realize that, Severus assessed with a tinge of sadness.

He snapped out of his nostalgic thoughts and focused again on what he was seeing.

On the tabletop, where no magazines lay, stood a purple and silver lava lamp. Severus walked over to it, picked it up and looked at it tilting it in different directions. After looking at it, he set it down and set off to explore further. There was a television, a VCR to go with it and a multitude of videotapes.

Some of them in their original cases, with some photos on the surface, others in cardboard packaging, with strips of labeled titles attached.

Everything was showing signs of use, nothing looked new.

The number of tapes made Severus aware of how much Sirius must have enjoyed watching movies in the past. It's possible he watched them with Regulus, or at least with Potter. In the dim light, they would sit on that bed, leaning against the pillows, maybe eating some snacks, and who knows, laughing, commenting, or watching in silence? Perhaps he still enjoyed it? No, it didn't seem like it. Nothing brought him joy now except drinking and sex. And that strange feeling he confessed to Severus, which still echoed in his ears. One day, he intended to ask Sirius to show him his favorite movie, he decided.

He touched everything, picked it up, sometimes sniffed it, curious about each thing.

He approached the giant walk-in closet, turned his face and looked inquiringly at his husband, who gave him a nod of approval. Another microcosmos, a world within a world. It felt like entering Sirius' mind, it was fascinating!

The wardrobe was filled with t-shirts, most often black, less often white or red, with images of

various bands or their names, shirts, some with frills, others plain, without any decoration. Some shelves were loaded with many pairs of jeans, leather trousers, some laced at the sides, from the hangers hung several leather jackets, coats. Belts, shoes, a lot of jewellery - everything had its place. One could easily open a clothes shop here!

An amused Severus shakes his head; he himself did not even have a tenth of the amount of his clothes.

Discovering this other, completely alien side of Sirius was fascinating. It was as if he was simultaneously leading two lives, one that of the infamous Wizard, now Auror, the other that of an ordinary Muggle boy. Which one was the real one? Severus realised that he really knew nothing not only about the second, but also about the first. If they are to give themselves a chance as a couple he will have to make up for it.

He noticed a large box standing on one of the shelves. He looked over, intrigued as to what Sirius might be storing there. Severus furrowed his brow - surely he's not sentimental enough to have his old toys in there?

Sirius followed his gaze and blushed. "Ah, that - if you want you can have a look, just don't think I'm a creep."

After such encouragement, Severus of course had to see what was inside. To his shock he saw newspapers with interviews with himself, with pictures of himself and articles about him, as well as a scrapbook of wedding photos that Severus hadn't even noticed had been taken. Now he blushed.

"Why?"

"I'm proud of you, of your accomplishments, and the interviews with you were pretty much the only way I got to know you. And the wedding album - when I look at those pictures I see what a long way we've come. Neither of us is the same person we were then anymore."

Severus looked at the photo of the cake cutting, looking at himself from that time, at how stressed and lost he was then, scared and desperate. Holding his hand Sirius was different too. Only now did Severus realise that he no longer looked like that, the aura of confidence and bravado that had surrounded him had vanished somewhere along the way and he hadn't even noticed.

Sirius probably knows a lot more about Severus than he realises. He himself can name the bands that Sirius wore on his t-shirts and his favourite alcohol, but beyond that he knew nothing about him. Even something as trivial as his favourite colour he would not know. This said a lot about their situation.

As he watched, he walked out of there and approached Sirius, who was standing there with a strangely determined look on his face, and as Severus approached, he reached towards the vinyl shelf, moved a few records until he finally pulled one out and handed it to Severus.

For a moment Severus was uncertain whether he should look or not. As long as he didn't, it remained a mystery, he could imagine it however he wanted. He had already stopped suspecting Sirius of planning cruel pranks some time ago, but at that moment he could not deny that for a moment he feared it.

Finally, he lowered his gaze.

To his eyes appeared a very slim woman, with her hands raised high and her oval, small face lowered, with a large nose and black hair reaching over her shoulders. From what he could see there was indeed something about her that resembled him. He looked at the writing on the record - "Patti Smith Group." So it really did exist. Sirius handed him another vinyl record, here Patti's face was clearly visible. Very slim, with sunken cheeks and protruding cheekbones. On the next cover she was kneeling in a white dress, and her arms and legs were so very, very slim. Like his. She wasn't a classic beauty but she was very intriguing, unsettling, she looked very sensual and wild.

Her eyes were not black, plus she had a fringe, but that was the biggest difference between her and his appearance.

Severus looked questioningly at his husband, who took the record from his hand, took the vinyl out of it, handed the box back to Severus and turned on the music. Severus did not know what he expected, but the woman's voice was both soft and strong, sounding as if she was reciting a poem and singing a song at the same time. Very intriguing. He listened for a moment, then pointed to the cover with a movement of his head.

"Why?" Severus was sure Sirius remembered that he had compared him to her when they were travelling to Severus' meeting with the readers.

Sirius blushed slightly and Severus opened his eyes wider in surprise. He didn't know he was capable of this!

"She is very beautiful, she has everything I look for in beauty." His blush deepened, but Sirius looked into Severus' eyes in spite of his embarrassment. "A very petite, slim figure, a head shorter in height than me, long black hair, a large, pronounced nose, wide, not very full lips, sunken cheeks."

Severus felt strange, Sirius saying this about a woman, real, alive, still young and attractive to him. About someone he could meet. With his heart beating anxiously, he bit his lower lip and waited to hear what else he would hear.

Sirius grunted. "She's perfectly beautiful, I like her incredibly, and that's because she reminds me a lot of a boy who caught my eye many years ago when I was still a teenager, but I was too stupid and blind to understand what attracted me to him and instead of trying to win him over, I tormented him.

But after I got to know him, I slowly started to appreciate him. Yes, she resembles that boy." He took a deep breath for a second, gathering his strength. "...and who I fell in love with about a year ago, maybe longer. He is even prettier than her."

It came too much, too fast. Severus had to restrain his instinct to escape. He didn't know where to look. Sirius' words almost stunned him; he was shocked, to put it mildly. Oh yes, he didn't doubt that he had caught Sirius' gaze years ago, Sirius hadn't let it go unnoticed. It was definitely not a pleasant memory, that was for sure. But it was in the past, he tried to forget.

Severus guessed that Sirius currently find him attractive, and for once in his life, allowing himself to feed his vanity, Severus wanted to hear it. He thought "you are like her" would be all he would hear, nothing prepared him for the confession of love.

It was one thing to say "I make a confession to you" and another to say "I love you."

"I like you" is a confession. "You are sweet" is also a confession. Very big ones. But nothing prepares you to hear "I love you." Severus would have expected there to be at least a few months gap between going out on dates and the formation of feelings, let alone using such big words!

Deep down Severus dreamt of love, of course, because why shouldn't he, but the fact that it came from Black was still too shocking.

Now all of a sudden he got it and didn't know what to do with it, in delicate emotional matters he moved like a newborn deer, he felt like Alice on the other side of the mirror, where the rules of the world were completely different. What was he supposed to answer? What do people do in such situations?

It is easier to deal with hatred than with love, he realised, in the former case every gesture and every word of yours is not so incredibly important, in the latter it is much easier to hurt someone deeply with one look than during an argument with an enemy with the worst insults. It was a very, very delicate situation. Although he himself had never professed love to anyone, he could guess what Sirius must have been feeling right now. The anxiety, the fear of ruining everything, of making a fool of himself....

Not wanting to prolong Sirius' silence and nervousness, Severus gathered his strength and lifted his face to look him in the eye.

"Sirius..." He began cautiously, not knowing himself what he wanted to say. He simply did not know what to say, the possibility had never even crossed his mind....

Sirius took the vinyl box out of his hands and squeezed his hand lightly. "Shh, you don't have to say anything. I wanted to tell you this, I wanted you to know. I know you're surprised, because I was too. But it is all true." Sirius smiled slightly, clearly trying to be brave. "If you want we can come back to this topic another time, okay?"

Still not knowing how to behave, what to do, what to say, Severus took a step towards Sirius. He was angry with himself that he had never been interested in human relationships; others had experience, knew how to handle such a situation, and he moved as if in a fog.

"Thank you." He walked closer, stood on tiptoe and, holding Sirius by the neck, bent him towards himself and kissed him. "Thank you." This time he whispered directly into his mouth, then ran the tip of his tongue over Sirius' lower lip, asking for permission to access what he had been given. He hoped it was a good answer for now, one that would not leave Sirius with a broken heart.

When at night he lay by sleeping Sirius, and listened to his even breathing he remembered the whole conversation, analysed it word by word. I was so blind and stupid, Severus judged, Sirius does not approach life scientifically and methodically, he is all emotion. Severus should have guessed that such an outburst of emotion on his part was possible and likely.

He himself during these years of marriage came to Sirius to ask for sex, and Sirius, in contrast to him, often sought his company just like that, just to sit together with him, sometimes talking, sometimes silent. Already these dates had bewildered Severus and thrown him off balance, but this confession was another level. He was glad Sirius had given him some time to think about it, he wasn't able to answer right away. Besides, he didn't even know what Sirius expected exactly.

"I love you too?" That would be untrue, he learned to like Sirius but love? That's too much and too soon.

No, Sirius is certainly not expecting these words. Rather, he is waiting for a promise to give his love a chance. This is what Severus might have tried to do.

He didn't even trust him in the long run, yes, now he believed that Sirius was actually in love with him but what would happen afterwards? For how long will his affection last? No, he was not going to get attached to it, take it for granted. The moment one begins to trust, the illusion begins, one discards one's shield, exposes oneself to blows and wounds, makes oneself vulnerable without being able to prepare for the despair to come.

The tenderness he received, the affection, it was like sweet poison, Severus hoped he wouldn't fall for it, he saw with his own eyes how it worked, he saw his mother, he would be a fool to expose himself to it personally.

But inside himself, somewhere deep down he had the feeling that it had already happened, he began to need Sirius.

The warmth of the man lying beside him, his strong, fit body, his quiet breathing, it all gave a sense of security and belonging. He didn't even know he needed it. He had always been sure that the social position and financial security his job gave him would be enough and replace everything. Evidently I was wrong, Severus judged, resting his cheek against Sirius' shoulder before falling asleep.

After this declaration of love not much changed, Sirius gave him space and time to think, they started to regularly go out on dates where they talked and got to know each other, without pressure from Sirius and it was very enjoyable, but to Severus' distress his husband tried even harder to reconcile him with his friends and took him to Sunday lunches with them or invited them to lunches at Grimmauld Place. More often, however, they went to the Potters', as the bursting energy of a 4-year-old and the old antique furniture and decorations did not go well together.

Severus was trying, really trying.

When he looked at them he felt no hatred, not even dislike, he felt only weariness. It was a new discovery, a surprising one. He watched them, holding a tea cup in his hand, with his elbows propped against his knees, slightly bent over, his long hair lying on his shoulders, in his robe. Both were still slim but looked much older than before, more tired. James was in jeans and a t-shirt, like Sirius, Lily in a strapless summer dress. Two strangers not from his world. They had changed, they looked different, they acted different, they were someone else.

Just because he did not feel the old hatred for them did not mean that he liked them. They were alien to him, they had nothing in common, for Sirius' sake he could see them, but if it wasn't for him, Severus would never have sought their company. They were as indifferent to him as Peter and his wife, Betty. Just random people he is forced to spend time with for whatever reason. Every now and then Lily and James would say something to Severus and ask him about this or that, and he, absent-minded, would answer them something.

Severus glanced at Harry running to his parents every now and then. The child was playing with something, saying something to himself every now and then and laughing. A well cared for, well fed happy, carefree child. He could say what he wanted about the Potters but they were good parents.

It wasn't the most fun entertainment, that's for sure. He might as well sit at Lucius' place and watch his child. It would even be a little bit more interesting, because he could talk to the Malfoys, maybe they didn't have too many topics in common and the older they got the less they did, but with the Potters he had absolutely none.

Of course, he could have worked in the workshop instead, at the back of the pharmacy which was closed that day. He loved it, could have done it for hours and never got bored with it. Instead, he sat in this family huddle which he found repellent and the precious hours slipped through his fingers. Huh, what one doesn't do to avoid hurting someone's feelings.

Severus could see Sirius smiling at Harry and occasionally puzzling him and the toddler talking to him casually, enthusiastically, occasionally casting dazed glances in Severus' direction. He didn't know him, so he feared him. Severus tried to smile to show that he was not threatening and Sirius then looked at him with such clear pride and joy as if Severus had just performed some extremely

complicated trick. Really, after all, he often smiled, why this surprise and strange reaction? Pfff, silly Sirius.

In a reverie, playing with the wedding ring on his finger Severus wondered if Sirius wanted such a life. He cannot give it to him. They would never have a child, unless they adopted some. Possibly that would be enough for Sirius and possibly not. He will have to talk to him about it. Not that anything can be done about it, at least not now that they're married.

He himself did not see himself as a parent, never intended to have children and has not changed his mind.

Not really concentrating on the conversation, only occasionally joining in, he shifted his gaze to the TV standing in the living room, they had one too, in Sirius' old rooms, but Severus never used it.

He would have to ask Sirius to show him what he liked to watch most.

Watching films together with Sirius.... It sounded so ordinary, normal and at the same time intimate. It should have pleased him, this interest and initiative on Severus' part.

When they returned from the Potters Sirius put his arm around his waist and kissed him on the lips. "Thank you."

Severus reciprocated the kiss and for a moment enjoyed the caress. "For what?"

"For being so nice to the Potters."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "You didn't think I'd behave like a simpleton and a boor, did you?"

Sirius began to laugh. "No, of course not!" He paused speaking for a moment to kiss Severus on the forehead and then on the tip of his nose. "I am simply happy."

This simple statement made Severus feel a wave of heat wash over him. Was it so little that Sirius needed to be happy? Ordinary going out with Severus and spending time with him in the company of Lily and James, without bickering or malice? This Severus could easily provide for him, it didn't cost him much to hold his tongue. If this is what Sirius wants from him, he can have it, he decided.

Chapter End Notes

I'm very sorry for the slow response to comments, one of my cats has been ill for over a week, I spent last night once again sleepless, in the animal hospital and I'm too exhausted mentally every day to collect my thoughts.

Thank you so much for all your comments, they make me really happy, even if it's just an emoticon it still makes my day, reading them is my happy moment after an exhausting day.

1983.09 Sirius

Sirius was now visiting Severus practically every day. He finished work a few hours earlier than Severus, so he very often came to his apothecary, sometimes still in Auror's clothes, and they usually talked and sometimes Sirius watched Severus work in concentration.

Sirius' work was not as fascinating to him as Severus' was to his own, there was peace and quiet when it came to major crimes, the so-called Death Eaters, a sect, a group of madmen under the leadership of some other madman who declared himself Dark Lord - Voldemort, made a fuss from time to time, every now and then someone would announce a new prophecy about the day when the Dark Lord would take over the world, but obviously nothing happened, which did not discourage his followers.

He knew he would never regain all the possibilities he had lost with his stupid "joke," but that didn't matter. He had a different life and different opportunities. Who knows if they weren't better than what would have happened if none of it had occurred? He had never had any ideas about himself, never knew what he wanted to do. He would probably have jumped from job to job, or maybe not worked at all and lived off the Black family's money, traveling around. Here, necessity somehow forced him to choose a direction, and as a result, he became an Auror. It may not have been the perfect job, but it brought more satisfaction than sitting in his old room, listening to depressing music, getting drunk to unconsciousness, and contemplating suicide. And now he had Severus!

Sitting on the floor with crossed legs and observing Severus's focused face, Sirius smiled to himself. Severus's entire existence, all his thoughts, were concentrated on his demanding and precise occupation. He was completely absorbed by it. It was clear that he loved it. Sirius felt a twinge of jealousy. He had never had something that consumed him to such a degree. It must be amazing to always know what one was meant to do, what one wanted to do. Severus's life followed a straight path ; he didn't ponder or hesitate, while his own was a labyrinth full of hidden corners where it seemed like every path led nowhere. So when Severus finally found an exit from that maze, Sirius grabbed hold of it with both hands and never wanted to let go.

That thought warmed his chest.

His beloved...

Severus didn't mind his presence, the silence between them wasn't heavy, it was surprisingly pleasant to have him beside him. His presence made the room seem friendlier, homelier, warmer and brighter. Severus's sense of danger and insecurity in Sirius's company disappeared somewhere unnoticed, which Sirius began to clearly realise. Those relaxed muscles, the calm face, the voice, it all became so surprisingly normal, so different from what it had been before. Sirius would never have believed that this would ever be possible. And here it is, he had someone who was happy to see him! How far they had come, he assessed with pride and sentiment.

Of course, not everything worked out perfectly and smoothly.

At times Sirius felt that their relationship was taking one step forward, two steps back, he felt as if they spoke two different languages and could not find common ground.

One such situation occurred when they were lying on the bed, Sirius' hand combing through the hair of his husband who, as always after sex, was relaxed, seemed soft and open, not separated from Sirius by the wall of uncertainty and hesitation he usually put up between them. Yes, lately this wall was getting smaller and smaller, and it was becoming transparent but it was always there.

Although he did not mention it, not wanting to make Severus feel the need to defend himself, he clearly recognised it.

Now they didn't have sex as often as in the very beginning when Severus discovered how much he liked it. Back then they wouldn't leave the bed for hours at a time, Sirius would have him four or five times a day and only Severus's infusions and ointments made him able to move with a fairly steady stride. It was still incredibly pleasant and they needed it badly, but now they did it once a day and that was enough for them, and Sirius added as much tenderness as possible, trying to get his spouse used to it.

That evening as they lay side by side, with bodies still warmed by pleasure, slightly damp from sweat and Severus' eyelids were closed, his lips parted as he recovered from the pleasure he had experienced. What they were doing clearly suited him very much, he liked to be passive. But then again, Severus, apart from those unsuccessful attempts when he was too nervous to do so, had never had the opportunity to try being an active party. Sirius did not want to be selfish so he decided to change that.

"Sev..." His hand now slid from Severus' hair to his bare shoulder, still hot and flushed from pleasure, where it began to make light circles on his skin. "Would you like to try swapping positions?"

Thin eyelids lifted and from under slightly pulled down eyebrows those bottomless black eyes looked up at him. "Switching positions? What do you mean?"

Severus was obviously still thinking about what they had recently done because he did not immediately understand what he was being asked, which was not often the case with him. Sirius smirked. "Would you like to be a top?"

Severus' eyes widened for a moment. "Oh... Would you like that? I can do it, of course, no problem." He nodded his head with seriousness. "I can do it."

Sirius wanted to laugh. Severus' enthusiasm was simply electrifying. His voice sounded as if Sirius was offering him to eat a potato raw and drink onion juice.

"Haha, that's not what I'm asking, I want to know if that's what you want."

Severus fell silent for a moment. "I never thought of that." He finally admitted. "But we can do it." This time he was clearly trying to make his voice light, but Sirius could easily see that it was feigned. The question was clearly not met with interest.

"Maybe some other time? It wasn't a proposal just a question, I was curious."

Severus raised himself on his elbows. "Then why mention it at all if you don't want it? Are you not comfortable with what we are doing?"

The development took Sirius by surprise; he couldn't hide it. "Jesus, Severus!" He began to laugh. "Don't get so angry right away, it was just that kind of wondering. Of course I like it, I love it, I'd love to stay inside of you." Although he laughed, Severus' frustration touched him.

"No need to be vulgar." Severus puffed and sat down on the bed, clearly ready to get up from it. Sirius sat down as well.

"I am not." He held his face in his hands and kissed him on the lips. "Are you angry with me?"

"I don't know." Severus admitted.

Sirius started laughing again. "You don't know?"

Severus nodded. "Yes, I don't know. I don't know what you expect from me, what you want. Whether you're asking because you want it or because you're curious. I don't know if you're telling

me this because you think I want to hear it or if you really think so. I don't know, Sirius, I just don't know." He sighed heavily. "Speak to me normally, no games. I don't want to guess what you want, I don't know how to do that. My world is science, not romance and gusts of heart." Severus put his arms around him and again looked as helpless and withdrawn as ever. Sirius felt as if he could actually read his thoughts from his tense face.

He guessed that Severus felt weary, unable to be in a relationship, to guess someone's needs or to flirt.

Severus was always like this, he was simply not cut out for it, and Sirius noticed it and did not mind, in fact he liked the slight awkwardness of his spouse in this matter.

But this frustrated Severus, he wanted clear messages. There was probably a torrent of words going through his head right now like "It was a mistake, I shouldn't have agreed to try to be in a relationship, it's pointless, I don't know how to do it, I don't have a natural feel for it, I'm sick of it. It seemed so easy to everyone around me, and I can't even tell if Sirius is asking seriously or joking." Something like that, he surmised, the fears and anxieties that everyone felt.

He had managed to get to know his husband enough to know by the look on his face when he was feeling insecure. Always tense and stressed, always alert. Sirius hoped that one day his freedom of behaviour would extend beyond the bed.

He was clearly not wrong in his assessment of the situation and Severus felt very discouraged and wanted to be alone because he slipped out of his arms, turned and started to lift himself to the exit, needing fresh air, most likely feeling that another moment and he would suffocate. Sirius knew this, for he had studied his husband's feelings like a map of the land.

"Don't go, stay. I love you." This stopped Severus in mid-motion so Sirius with a quick movement put out his arm and wrapped it around Severus' waist, his lips and hot breath touching his spouse's skin just below the ear. "Why are you so upset? Nothing big has happened, everything is fine." Sirius turned him towards himself so Severus lifted his face and looked into his eyes, clearly not wanting Sirius to notice how resigned he felt but his gaze betrayed it.

"I'm not playing with you, it was just curiosity. I don't know why you think you don't know this or that, we get along surprisingly easily. Sorry, I didn't mean to spoil the mood. I'm being absolutely honest now, I'm one hundred per cent comfortable with what we're doing and I have no desire or need for any changes, okay?" His thumb stroked the protruding cheekbones and sunken, pale cheek. "You're so stressed, so tense." His fingers stroked his jaw, gently brushed his lips causing a tickling sensation in them.

"I love you, trust me."

Slowly, he felt the tension leave Severus's body and it grew soft and yielding to his hands again. Once they were back on the bed, Severus leaned against the headrest and looked intently at Sirius' face, as if searching for signs of falsity. "Why did you ask that?" He had not yet dropped the subject, still unsure of himself.

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. "I know you've never done it, and I was curious if you were curious." All in all, as he thought about it now, he used to realise that there was no necessity for this question, Severus if he wanted something he was clearly asking for it, but it was too late, it had already happened.

Severus pondered for a moment, still staring at Sirius. "Do you want to do it this way?" He was slowly regaining his confidence, which Sirius noticed with relief.

He grasped Severus' hand and squeezed it lightly. "I prefer what we do."

The eyebrows above the black eyes drew together, Severus questioning everything as always.

"Really? Or are you telling me that so that I stop talking? Every now and then you ask me if I want to swap positions. Be honest with me, please, Sirius."

Despite the not-so-pleasant course of the conversation, Sirius was glad they had it. It was a real

conversation, something Severus didn't often allow, often doing the evasive actions he was now accusing Sirius of. "Really. I never want to silence you."

Sirius placed cushions around them so that they could comfortably rest while they talked, now knowing that the topic would not end soon. "I do not get almost any pleasure from bottoming. You know, it differs from person to person, everyone's prostate is totally different. I did not know that it would work with you. When I first fingered you I simply hoped that you would enjoy it so much that you would want more. When you reached a handfree orgasm I could not believe my luck, I felt as if I had won the lottery. You reacted so intensely, when you become undone you are so damn sexy, it's the sexiest sight I've ever seen."

A blushing Severus averted his gaze, looking somewhere to the side, and Sirius knew full well that it wasn't the graphic talk of sex that had caused his embarrassment. He was still not used to compliments. I will have to tell him them more often, Sirius decided.

"So you don't feel that way?"

Sirius shook his head. "No, never. Generally my prostate doesn't particularly respond. I've tried doing it not only with others, I thought maybe they couldn't do it, but when I fingered myself, even repeatedly, I didn't particularly feel it either." He shrugged his shoulders.

Severus stared wide-eyed, clearly surprised by such a confession. He quickly recovered from his surprise and squinted his eyes, clearly analysing the subject.

It was an interesting issue, and it surely stimulated Severus' medical interest. He quickly allowed his attention to be redirected in that direction.

"Oh, really? Interesting...I don't think there's much research on the subject. At least I haven't come across it. It is possible that there is more on the subject in publications from other languages, I'll have to search." Now he had turned all academic, the way Sirius knew him from his lectures and speeches, he was definitely in his element. He was already so preoccupied with the subject that it seemed he was about to jump out of bed to run to the library.

"Of course, do so. But if I'm honest I don't think you'll find much, the topic of male sexuality among homosexuals is not particularly popular." He knew what he was talking about. Sirius, being a very sensual person, often searched for information on the subject of sexuality, he did not like not knowing something, so he dug through his family library as well as the library at Hogwarts, but he did not find much on the subject of homosexual love let alone sex. The Muggle world was better stocked on the subject, but also not enough for his needs. "Are you going to tackle this topic?"

Severus had listened to him attentively like a child's tale, and now he was clearly drifting off with his thoughts, who knows if, in his mind, he wasn't already doing an analysis of the prostate and its secret workings. "Possibly, I am not ruling it out."

Sirius was certain that this was what he would be doing. He smiled affectionately, looking at the serious face of his spouse. The storm has passed.

At times they would revisit their rocky pasts and this was far worse than talking about positions in bed.

During one meeting at the Pettygrew's, Peter inadvertently made a reference to their school days and the jokes they made to Severus.

Sirius squirmed like an eel when Peter's reminiscence came up, trying to use his gaze to tell him to quiet down, but he didn't see it and continued talking.

"Do you remember how acrimonious you were towards Severus? Shit, you could sniff him out from a mile away!" Peter began to laugh, not noticing his guests' discomfort. "Who would have expected you to end up with each other for real, and not just because of this decree."

Sirius blushed embarrassed and anger, annoyed at his colleague who had not even realised that, with absolute lack of sensitivity, he had broached a very delicate subject on which even those involved themselves had moved very, very carefully, and went on.

Drop dead now, Sirius wished him in his mind, while, laughing and chattering on, the host looked in amusement at Severus, stoic as ever around the others, who had not shown his thoughts with the slightest expression when they were in the guesthouse, but when from there Floored to Grimmauld Place he was strangely quiet and when Sirius tried to embrace him he nimbly slipped from his arms.

"Severus." Sirius held his husband's hand. "Please, let us talk."

Severus turned his face sideways, so that he was not looking at him, and was silent, long enough for Sirius to expect that he would not speak. But finally he did, in a voice strangely tight and a tad higher than usual. "Why did you attack me?"

It was obvious that this topic would return. It would probably never really die, it would always be present somewhere, and the only thing Sirius could hope for was that in time it would lose focus and stop causing such pain to Severus and a sense of shame and grief to him.

"I don't know. Because I was stupid? Out of boredom?" Sirius brushed back his hair in a nervous motion. "Yes, that is the only explanation, there was absolutely nothing in you to justify such behaviour, the way we treated you. Anyone could have been in your position. At the time I thought it was funny, pranks. Now I know better. I'm sorry, I really regret what I did. You don't even know how much."

Severus nodded, no doubt guessing that indeed Sirius was not proud of it.

But it still wasn't enough, clearly he still hadn't gotten out what was weighing most heavily on his heart. "Setting someone up for murder and setting a friend up for a murder is no joke. Even if that wasn't the intention, those were the consequences if James hadn't interfered."

Before Sirius knew it, the fiery side of his personality had taken over and instead of trying to defuse the situation, he began to inflame it.

"Why did you go where I told you? What I did was terrible no doubt, but you suspected that Lupin was a werewolf. Why on Earth would you go after him? Arrogance! Stupid, utter arrogance."

Black eyes widened in disbelief, but Sirius wasn't finished yet. "Why exactly in this situation did you decide to do what I told you? Why, Severus, why?"

This conversation was going badly, so badly that Sirius' heart was pounding like a hammer from anxiety. He already regretted his outburst, even if it was his honest thoughts.

Severus snatched his hand from Sirius' hand, and raised his upper lip in disdain. "So this is my fault? For years you have tormented me at every opportunity whenever you were bored. I was an easily accessible entertainment for you, a toy, something along the lines of football, nothing to feel pain and have emotion. And now you find that even the natural and normal curiosity of a sixteen-year-old is my crime!" Severus sounded like a wounded animal when he finally allowed himself to show emotion.

This conversation had come full circle and Sirius felt like waving his arms or smashing something. "It's not your fault, it's mine, I already told you! I just can't understand why you went there!"

It seemed as if all the energy and anger had left Severus, his shoulders slumped and his voice became only slightly louder than a whisper. "Because it never occurred to me that you would really do it, that you would be capable of it. I didn't think you hated me to that extent." Now he sounded weary, mentally exhausted and very depressed.

Sirius seized him in his arms and hugged him close. "I wasn't worth much and whatever you thought of me then was probably too good anyway. But I have changed. I'm sorry, dear, I'm really sorry. I love you and if I could change the past I would.

Severus' breathing was deep, slightly trembling and his body was stiff to the touch, so different from the last time Sirius had taken him in his arms and it had let itself be shaped like butter.

After this outburst Severus did not speak for the rest of the day, and Sirius gave him his space he needed to sort his feelings and thoughts.

He himself also did the same, only in his own way. Usually, sometimes when he felt particularly crushed by the weight of the world, Sirius would go into a rage and smash things in the room, having first told Severus to leave if he didn't want to witness it. Now Severus was on the other side of the house so Sirius could do it without restraint.

So he did, smashing to pieces the china collected by the Blacks, adored by Walpurga, hated by Orion, because it couldn't be otherwise. You're welcome, daddy, he thought with irony. Eventually this improved Sirius' mood enough to calm him down.

Sirius knew that Severus hadn't forgiven him. Saving his life simply outweighed everything and made Severus want to change their relationship. He wanted to get to know Sirius and finally decided to give their relationship a chance. And Sirius was very afraid that he would screw it up and Severus would leave him after those 10 years pass.

In the evening Severus said nothing to the fact that Sirius, as always, came to sleep with him, and while sleeping, he turned to face him and snuggled in. In the morning everything returned to normal and there was no trace of the previous day's tense atmosphere.

The worst part was when topics came up that were impossible to reconcile.

After returning from Harry's 4th birthday party, to which Sirius and Severus were, of course, invited, Sirius still recalled with amusement the funny way Harry pronounced the words and Severus' shocked face when, already accustomed to his presence, the child climbed into his lap. Severus had never yet looked as if he didn't know what to do or say so he just sat, letting the birthday boy talk baby-talk to himself and then feeding him cake. This sight made Sirius burst into laughter and pat his knees, while the sharp glance sent his way by Severus only increased his amusement. James showed quick reflexes and took a photo of them, which Sirius was already looking forward to and planning to put on the fireplace.

"Would you like to have a child?" Severus asked with a nonchalant tone.

Sirius, still in a jovial mood, turned to him with a smile. "Yes, of course, but I haven't really thought about it much. It didn't make sense before, and I still don't have time for it now. Do you?"

"No, I don't want to," came the immediate response, apparently well thought out. "I never planned for it; I don't see myself in the role of a parent."

Sirius's good mood clearly diminished. "Oh... why? You would be a great parent." He paused and reflected. "Well, maybe not great, but definitely a very good one!" Of course, Severus had the right to make that decision, and Sirius shouldn't try to persuade him to change his mind, he knew that

himself. He hoped that Severus wouldn't feel attacked.

"This is not a question of what kind of parent I would be, but rather that I don't want children." They locked eyes. Severus sighed. "I knew this topic would come up eventually. Our expectations for life are different, Sirius, and there is no room for compromise in this matter. Either one side gives up their happiness, or the other does."

So Sirius was not mistaken; Severus must have thought about it a lot. "But there is room for compromises!" He caught Severus' hands and locked them in his own. "I've told you, I haven't thought about it much. We don't have to change anything, adopt, everything can stay as it is." Panic took his breath away; this conversation was going badly, very badly.

Severus's black eyes strangely shimmered in the warm summer evening, and Sirius felt like they were reflecting the starlight.

"It would be selfish of me to deprive you of what you want."

Sirius flinched as if struck. "I want you!" He knew it was too much, too fast, but he said it before he could think. "I don't need any children, please, believe me!"

Severus only turned his face away, with a sad expression in his eyes. So they couldn't come to an agreement, and it would always cast a shadow on their future.

They walked the rest of the way home in silence, but Sirius never lost hope because after a few steps, Severus's hand closed around his hand.

1983.09 Severus

Severus wasn't sure if Sirius wasn't coming in more often to check that he wasn't actually working on the potions from that Egyptian book, because he was afraid something would happen to Severus again, or if he wanted to spend time with him. He supposed a little of everything but most of the last. Sometimes, when he finished preparing some order, he caught himself waiting when Sirius would unceremoniously burst from the Floo, bringing with him the scent of his shampoo and fresh air and would kiss him in greeting.

The absence of his presence Severus felt like something unnatural. He was beginning to treat him as he had once treated Lily - as a friend.

He also liked Sirius physically, which was an added bonus, his muscular body, broad shoulders, strong arms and muscular thighs were very much on Severus' mind, but even if he wasn't his type, his personality was enough.

On those rare days when he wasn't back together with Sirius, Severus grew very fond of coming home to someone waiting for him. A home that Severus had stopped planning to leave.

A warm body by his side, someone he could talk to, someone who cared and who he too had begun to care about, more than he would like to admit to himself. It was nice, he never expected to have something like this in his life. Yes, he had hoped to find a good job and become financially stable, but a partner, a lover - this seemed a luxury which he did not even intend to try to get, a luxury without which he could also live.

Severus was self-sufficient, he never needed anyone. Sirius opened up another world to him, showed him feelings Severus didn't even know he lacked.

When he was alone in his lab, whether working on potions or spells or translating texts, every now and then he would catch himself wondering what Sirius would think of this or that.

Rediscovering Sirius, getting to know him, was an interesting activity. When Severus allowed himself to let go of the constant anxiety, seeing Sirius only as his former bully who had tried to kill him, letting go of that tightly held resentment, he discovered an intelligent, vibrant, dedicated, energetic and affectionate guy who had been trying to show him favour for some time. He was also surprised to discover that Sirius loved physical contact, cuddling, knees touching, lying with his head in Severus' lap or holding Severus' head in his lap or laying it on his chest when they were in bed, combing his hair, tender kisses, bathing together, walking by the hand. Severus did not particularly need it, but he did not mind it either, although he was much more restrained in making physical contact.

He liked to listen to the tone of his voice when he told an anecdote from work with amusement or the sound of his merry laugh.

And now Severus wanted to get to know him more, from this other, unknown side to him.

Usually it was Sirius who took the initiative to spend time together, so Severus, not wanting to feel like a girl being picked on, decided to change that.

"This world of Muggles you so adore." Severus, still busy shredding mandrake root, spoke up suddenly, breaking the silence.

"Yes?" Intrigued, Sirius lifted his head from over Severus' book, which, as far as Severus could tell, he had already read several times. This was the latest release, the third book by Severus, being a compilation of little-known spells and potions from various corners of the world, which Severus had catalogued and revised, so that they were safe for use. The Egyptian ones he did not put there

for the time being, as he promised Sirius not to work on them, he put them aside for later. Sirius had also read both of the earlier books published by Severus, he had heard that one of them had replaced the old potions textbook at Hogwarts.

Severus turned his face to his husband and smiled slightly.

"Show me some of it."

Sirius smiled broadly, showing white teeth. "Of course! Your wish is an order to me! I'll pick out something cool that you might like!"

The choice fell on the concert. A few days after this conversation, Sirius came to Severus' laboratory all excited, holding something in his hand. He handed it to Severus with a joyful cry of "look!"

So Severus looked. They were tickets to a concert. The name of the band didn't mean anything to him, because it couldn't be otherwise. He was totally unfamiliar with the music of Muggles, and he was not particularly familiar with that of Wizarding World either.

"Bauhaus? I think I've seen that name on your t-shirt."

"And you're right!"

Less than two months later, when the day of the concert arrived, Severus was no longer so sure that exploring the world of the Muggles was such a good idea. He closed the shop early that day, as Sirius had asked him to, so that they would have time to get to the concert before the livehall opened. He had time to shower when his spouse came to pick him up, as always.

"Ready?" He greeted him with a kiss.

"I have to change, so we still have to get home." Severus looked down at himself, at his robe. "Or we could change my clothes here, for I have no Muggles clothes. But what should I wear?" He drew down his eyebrows in thought.

Sirius also took in the sight of his figure. "You can go as you are now."

Well, yes, Sirius does not know how to be serious. Severus crossed his arms over his chest. "In the robe? Are you joking? Muggles don't dress like that."

Sirius' hand brushed the strands of hair away from Severus' face, exposing his cheekbone, which he then began to gently run his thumb over. "It'll be okay, trust me." He lifted Severus' hand and kissed it on the top.

The wide grin and the clear infatuation in Sirius' eyes made Severus feel embarrassed. "And what are you going to wear?"

"In what I am in now."

Severus assessed with his eyes the tight leather black trousers, the black t-shirt with cut-off sleeves, with Bauhaus written on it.

"You're making a joke on me, right? Aren't you?" He slowly began to feel uneasy again. This inappropriate clothing was a trifle, but this willingness to have fun at his expense did not bode well for the future.

"Severus..." Sirius kissed him on the lips "I do not. You'll be fine, you won't draw anyone's attention."

Severus nodded but the anxiety remained.

This falling in love of Sirius and his loving behaviour, when will it end? Did his mother feel the same way, and did his father also once profess his love for her, kissed her on the hands and lips, and is this why she stuck by him so tenaciously, despite the fact that he beat her and called her names in an alcoholic frenzy, in the hope that the past would return against all odds and she would hear those words of love again?

Was he just slowly setting himself up for such a future, despite seeing what it would end up like?

The concert was not as bad as Severus feared it would be, but he did not intend to repeat the experience too often.

As Sirius said, no one looked at Severus strangely, his clothes not only did not stand out, but in fact seemed very modest and ordinary in comparison with what others were wearing!

Sirius clearly attracted glances, which did not surprise Severus, because it was so wherever he appeared. Apparently his beauty was universal, and just as the Wizards were not immune to it, neither are the Muggles.

Severus, for some reason, was not considered ugly either, much to his surprise, on the contrary, and before the show starts, people of both sexes came up to him and chatted friendly, complimenting his appearance. Severus, not used to such behaviour felt embarrassed and did not know what to say, but fortunately Sirius rescued him from his predicament and conducted the conversation himself. Short clothing revealing the midriffs, arms, necklines, legs, and even groin areas caused Severus to blush and not know where to look. In the wizarding world, it would be unheard of; there, women wore floor-length dresses that covered their bodies, and men, at their discretion, wore robes or Muggle clothing that also concealed their bodies. Rebels like Sirius were a rare occurrence. He didn't seem at all shocked by this! Suddenly, he felt a hand on his waist, drawing him closer and by his ear he heard Sirius' slightly amused voice. "Oh, are you embarrassed?"

"No," he retorted sharply and, with a determined stride as if he knew exactly what he was doing, he moved towards the stage.

The smell of alcohol mingled with that of sweat and hair spray, the music was too blaring and those throngs of people pushing against him, jumping, dancing, singing, hitting him from time to time with their hands as they danced. It was wild, much too wild for his personal taste.

He felt so out of place as never before.

Finally, when once again Severus was pushed by the amused people, Sirius stood behind him and put his arms around him, separating him from the rest.

Severus did not know what to do, so he stood rigidly upright, with his arms crossed at stomach level. From time to time he raised his face and looked at the delighted, sometimes singing with the band, Sirius, who was clearly having a great time.

At one point Severus became aware that Sirius had tied his hair into a ponytail, and as Sirius turned to look at someone who had bumped into him in the heat of the dance, Severus noticed a black, wide ribbon in his hair. He squinted his eyes, trying to see it accurately. It couldn't be the same ribbon Severus wore tied around his eyes, could it?

And although he could not be sure, his subconscious told him that this was the case, and suddenly he also became certain, although he had no proof of this, that this was not the first time Sirius had this ribbon with him. For some reason Severus felt tears rush to his eyes, some absurdly strange emotion squeezing his throat. The smoke and flashing headlights helped him to hide this unusual state, otherwise Severus would have feared embarrassment.

He sniffled lightly with his nose, and while pretending to brush back his hair, wiped away a tear which had managed to escape. Is this how it feels when the soul is, like a fish, caught on the hook

of tenderness ?

Is this the kind of feeling that draws you deeper and deeper into the depths, until you can no longer see anything else, and only this feeling becomes the meaning of life and there is always not enough of it? That strange spilling heat in his chest, and that fluttery feeling in his stomach? It took so little to lose yourself? Just an island of tenderness in a sea of empty, cold, indifference, a familiar face expressing joy at the sight of you in the middle of thousands of strangers looking through you? A tender gesture here, a caress there, a warm smile and kind words. And already then you stop being yourself, you lose your common sense, you are driven by emotions. You become property, you want to belong. He didn't want it, he didn't want to become a slave to it, and at the same time something attracted him, made his will no longer matter, and the guidance took over his heart and instincts.

And his heart was pounding so hard, far too fast, his breaths were uneven, and he began to tremble. Without thinking of what he was doing, he moved slightly away from Sirius, and turned in his arms facing him, rested his head on his shoulder and snuggled his face into the hollow at his neck. Sirius stood still for a moment, surprised by this turn of events, and then his arms embraced Severus tightly and hugged him close. Still not understanding what was happening, he began to stroke Severus' back with one hand and his hair with the other.

Severus closed his eyes. He felt himself slowly calming down, that shocking moment of strange emotionality passing.

After a few minutes he was back to the old Severus and could turn to face the scene.

Sirius' hand kept stroking his cheek and hair as Severus lifted his face and began to move away.

"Are you okay now? What happened?" In the semi-darkness that had just arisen after most of the floodlights had been switched off, Sirius' face had a ghostly look, but even then the concern was clearly visible on it

"Yes, everything's fine." Severus was very disturbed but he wasn't going to admit it. What a pathetic moment of weakness!

"Did you feel bad? Is the music too loud? Do you want to get out of here?" Sirius chattered and chattered, trying to guess what had happened, but fortunately, to Severus' relief, it didn't even come close to the truth.

Severus offered him a slight smile. "I feel fine already." And he turned to face the stage. The rest of the concert passed without any disturbance.

As they left the concert and passed dozens of excited people they set off for the motorbike parked across the street. The evening was bright and warm for the time of year, the moon was already high in the sky. Sirius took Severus' hand and intertwined his fingers with his.

"How did you like it?"

Severus thought for a moment, assessing his impressions.

"These energetic crowds of people surprised me a little, but I liked their expressive joy. It's surprising how seeing a band can make people happy."

He grinned at the look of disbelief on his spouse's face. Well, yes, he was also one of those people who enjoyed it so much. It was charming in its own way. "It's not my favourite new way to spend time but I can't say I didn't enjoy it. I could do it again!"

Suddenly, the sound of a sigh caught their attention. Severus looked ahead and met Remus' gaze, who looked at them in surprise for a second, shifted his gaze to their clasped hands, then back to Severus' face, as if to make sure it was definitely him, and then nodded in greeting before hurrying past them. Not once did he look at Sirius.

Severus felt Sirius' hand tighten a little tighter around his.

The good mood instantly evaporated.

They didn't talk throughout the drive home, which was done the Muggles way, as was their arrival

at the venue.

The atmosphere was so tense that it was almost palpable, Sirius' stress filling every atoms between them.

Severus understood this, this clash with the past was very harrowing even for him, let alone Sirius. Suddenly Sirius awoke from an intoxicating dream of happiness and saw with his own eyes the victim of his thoughtlessness and bravado, someone whose life he had destroyed and whom he had kicked out of the Wizarding World. The sensation was certainly similar to if a mirror had been placed in front of him in which, instead of his beautiful face, he could have seen all the hideousness and evil of his soul filling his life. It must have been a terrible feeling, Severus did not doubt it.

They talked only fleetingly until they went to bed, and though Severus supposed Sirius would need time to himself and to be alone, Sirius still came into his bedroom, and when they were lying under the blanket, like two spoons, he cuddled his face into Severus' hair, hugging him tightly to himself, much more desperately than before until Severus began to worry, so he lay and listened, alert, but eventually it passed, and after several minutes Sirius' breathing became slower and the embrace of his arms around Severus' body less desperate. Sirius fell asleep, so he too could do so.

For the next few days they never returned to the subject of Remus, although they talked about the concert and the date in the world of Muggles, their memories ended just before leaving to the motorbike. The wound in Sirius' soul was apparently still too deep, he was too ashamed to want to talk about it. Besides, what was there to talk about? That he did not want it? It was obvious, of course not. He may have wanted Severus to be killed, injured or 'just' threatened, but he never planned to harm Remus. It was fate that made it work out the other way round, Severus coming out unscathed and Remus losing everything. Yes, it was sensible that they did not revisit this difficult subject yet again, their fragile reconciliation might not have withstood a detailed flashback of the issue.

But that fleeting encounter had bothered Severus, and he had also seen Sirius grow dim.

Eventually, Severus decided it wouldn't hurt to talk to Remus.

It took him a while to get his contact details, helped by Lucius, whom Severus had asked for help. Severus didn't wonder how he'd done it, but when asked if he could do it, he confirmed, and the documents he'd received reassured him that Lucius wasn't bragging.

And so the following Friday Severus found himself dining in a Muggle restaurant with Remus, who to his surprise immediately accepted the invitation. Severus did not really know why he wanted to meet him or what he wanted to say, he just felt that he had to do it, like a moth to the flame, he had to meet and talk to the guy who almost, through no fault of his own, had killed him, to meet Sirius' second victim. It was ordinary human curiosity, and the fact that Remus accepted the invitation proved that he wasn't above it either.

Dressed in a trench coat, for it was the garment that most resembled a robe, Severus sat opposite Remus in the small, cosy café. It's been years since they met earlier than this chance encounter after the concert, a meeting that had taken place under less than pleasant circumstances, but they both knew what they needed to talk about.

Severus looked down at his cup of coffee, a look of solemnity on his face, and watched Remus

who looked as if he was struggling to find the right words. Despite the passage of years, Lupin had not changed much. He was still slim, with the same hairstyle as when he was at Hogwarts, only with a more bitter look on his face. Despite his young age, he already had slight lines near his mouth from bitterness.

Remus also looked at him and appraised him, driven by the same kind of curiosity.

After a few moments of silence, Severus took a deep breath and began to talk. "How are you getting on?"

It probably wasn't the most sophisticated question but it was sincere. Severus wanted very much to know how he was, whether life among Muggles was as unbearable as he feared it would be.

Remus shrugged his shoulders. "Fine, I guess. It hasn't been easy but I'm used to it and somehow I've gotten into this life. I have a nice job at the library, a nice girlfriend, new friends. I'm sure it won't surprise you, but I have trust issues." A sad smile appeared on Remus' lips.

No, that didn't surprise Severus. But the rest of what he'd heard didn't sound so bad, quite good even, not counting of course the fact of coercion and lack of choice his life was no worse than that of the Potters for example. Or his and Sirius'.

Remus sipped his coffee before continuing to speak. "It was surprising to see you two together, holding hands. The victim of an attempted murder and the one who planned this would-be murder. Strange how things work out in life, don't you think? How did it come to this?"

Severus felt it was dangerous to tell the whole truth so he gave a condensed version. "The Ministry has issued a decree ordering all people entering adulthood to marry. This has been going on for a few years now, Sirius believes that dictatorship reigns and is probably not very far from the truth." He shrugged his shoulders and took a sip of coffee. "Anyway, it just so happened that me and Sirius stayed together."

Remus took a moment to analyse the information he had heard before nodding. "I see."

Severus hoped he didn't understand after all, but knowing Remus' brilliant mind, he could safely assume that he had guessed that the wedding was not taken by heart choice.

"How do you deal with that? That holding of hands and that going out to the concert.... It didn't seem forced by decree. The way he looked at you and the way you looked at him didn't either. You love him, don't you?" Remus looked him in the eyes. "Yes, you love him, it shows in you. And he loves you."

Embarrassed, Severus glued his gaze to his coffee, bit his lower lip and answered nothing. He wished Remus would stop talking about the subject; Severus' feelings did not matter here.

He took a bigger breath to encourage himself. "It's not bad. For the first few years we had to ...get on with our lives together which didn't always come easily, for the past year, maybe two years, things have improved a lot." Severus still couldn't bring himself to look Remus in the eye. "In the beginning, what united us most was our unwillingness to meet with the Black family. The demon-in-law would have tormented anyone with her nagging!"

Remus looked up with amusement. "Demon-in-law?"

"Sirius' mother. She constantly praises Regulus and his family and always has a new reason to complain." Severus also smiled slightly. "But things are different now, things have begun to settle down. He is treating me well, Remus, better than I expected."

Remus tapped his finger nervously on the table top. "You were sent there to die because Sirius betrayed me. He put his own vendetta before my safety and your life."

Severus looked down at his coffee cup, swirling the remnants around. "Yes, well. Sirius was always impulsive. And he had a particular dislike for me." To put it mildly, he assessed.

Remus leaned forward, his voice low and intense. "Do you know what he did to me, Severus? Do you understand the significance and gravity of that? He has so simply revealed my greatest secret.

He revealed to the entire school that I was a werewolf, yes, to the entire Wizarding World. Because of him, I was forced to leave Hogwarts. He took away my abilities, he took away my life. And he did it as a friend, not an enemy." Remus' eyes narrowed and his mouth twisted. "Do you know how terrified I was and not understanding what was going on when I was arrested by the Aurors? Then the hours of interrogation, the fingerprinting, the taking of the wand. And when I found out from scraps of what they were saying what was going on, can you imagine the sense of betrayal...? And all this for a joke!" He hid his face in his hands for a moment and breathed heavily before pulling himself together. "I was so scared, so lost, I was afraid I would end up in jail." He shook his head and let out a shuddering sigh.

They sat in silence for a while, Severus giving Remus time to calm down.

A while later Severus looked up, meeting Remus' eyes. "I know," he said quietly. "And I'm sorry it happened to you." He bit his lower lip slightly again. "He's changed..." He muttered finally, painfully aware that he sounded just as Lily had sounded when she had come to him.

Remus sat straight back in his chair, frustration etched on his face. "I understand that, Severus. But that doesn't excuse what happened. I'm glad it worked out for you, it didn't for me. I see you have forgiven him, that is sure. I cannot. I tried, believe me, but every time I think about it.... About his reasons for doing it... It's incomprehensible! He used my condition to try to murder someone, my greatest weakness and tragedy in life to make someone "prank".

Severus could only nod in agreement. It was true and he didn't understand it either, couldn't, and never would. He did not ask Sirius about it, because he knew how much he was ashamed and regretted it, yes, sometimes he referred to the past, but he tried to do it as rarely as possible, nothing good ever came out of it.

"That I have forgiven him is too much to say. I just try to treat it as if it happened in another life, maybe in a dream, and treat Sirius like someone I first met a few years ago, someone new, different. I know he regrets and is ashamed, and that's basically enough for me. It shows how far he has come since then."

It was not easy to put these feelings into words, to give them shape.

They were silent again for a while.

Remus hesitated, clearly bothered by something else, then spoke shyly again. "Severus, I want to apologise to you. I know I wasn't always the nicest to you when we were at Hogwarts."

Severus shrugged his shoulders, taking another sip of coffee. All apologies came too late. But he appreciated them nonetheless; Peter and James had so far failed to do so. "It's all water under the bridge now. But it was a dark time for all of us." He didn't recognise himself, not long ago he would have clung to the past himself, and now he could say something like that. Privilege of comfort, he acknowledged, now he was in the comfortable position of knowing Sirius loved him so he approached past events with a little more understanding. Remus did not have this privilege. Being confronted with the fragment of the world from which he had been cast out certainly disturbed his spiritual peace, shattered what he had already built and caused terrible pain, but he chose to do it anyway. It was stronger than him. Severus understood that.

"You've changed a lot." Remus' sudden voice snapped Severus out of his reverie.

Severus tilted his head and looked questioningly. "Oh?"

"You have become confident, calm, relaxed. You don't seem to be expecting an attack all the time, you don't sneak and sneak with a look full of suspicion. And now even when you walked in here you did it differently, as if you were at home, as if you knew you fit in. It's an amazing change!" Remus gestured slightly when he said this. "Yes, Sirius is no doubt no longer a bully to you...I am

very glad. I wish you the best."

Severus nodded slowly, took a sip of his coffee and looked at Remus with a blank expression on his face. "With reciprocation," he said flatly.

So that was how they saw him. Scared, sneaking around. And he thought he showed no fear!

What a humiliation...

For the next hour, they talked about lighter topics over an apple pie and finally said goodbye.

Severus did not tell Sirius about the meeting, he had nothing positive to tell him and did not want to depress him even more.

As he lay beside Sirius at that night and listened to his steady breathing and his heavy hand was flung across his hip, grounding Severus, Remus' words still echoed in his head - "you love him, it shows in you." ... "You love him." Was that the case? Was that sense of freedom and security, that belief in Severus's feelings and certainty that he would always have that, that desire to spend time with him and joy at the sight of him, not to be bored by even the most trivial of conversations, that desire to take the worries away from Severus - was that love?

1983.11 Sirius

Chapter Summary

Did the story get boring from a certain point?

I'm in the middle of writing a Snarry fic right now and would like to avoid the mistakes from that fic.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"What are you thinking about?"

Sirius twitched, snapped out of his reverie by his husband's soft voice.

Severus was sitting on the couch, with one leg bent, the other stretched out, with the book he had just been reading in his hand, warmth emanating from him and it was the closest thing to happiness Sirius could dream of. This naturalness, a simple lazy moment, during which they are themselves and do not pretend anything. Cups of tea on the table, candles lit, and this pleasant, not empty silence.

That tender, intimate touch of the hip against the hip as Severus instinctively sought contact with him.

If Sirius had to choose and not have either passion or tenderness for the rest of his life, he would keep the tenderness. It's not that he didn't like sex, he loved it! But he would rather lose the memories of Severus writhing in his arms and asking for more than the ones of them laughing about something at breakfast. If someone had told him in his Hogwarts days that he would prefer holding hands on walks and cuddling on the sofa to a night of wild passion Sirius would have laughed him off. But now he thought otherwise. Perhaps it was a sign of premature ageing? He did not know. But he knew that sex, even the best sex he could have with anyone, with a hookup, with a sex worker, with a friend with benefits. It is the pleasure of the body. Tenderness, however, he could only have with someone close to him, someone he trusted and who he trusted, someone he longed to see and hear and touch, to whom his thoughts ran when he had time at work. Tenderness is Severus.

He realised that his feeling was not reciprocated, Severus did not love him, but Sirius was of good mind, he believed that would change. He didn't love him YET. Besides, he was already well on his way to doing so, of that Sirius was certain. Severus himself looked for opportunities to spend time with him, enjoyed casual physical contact, even as innocent as this one now, initiating conversations and often looking at him when he thought Sirius couldn't see it, with those unfathomable black eyes of his.

From time to time Severus seemed to be absent-minded as he looked at him in reverie. Sirius caught him at it several times.

The changes were tiny but noticeable. Sirius picked them up like tiny seashells on the beach, which by themselves are easy to miss but when there are several on a thread they suddenly become obvious.

Yes, Sirius was of a good mind. All it would take was time and patience. And if he could have love then he wouldn't need anything anymore.

And that was what he was thinking about, but of course he couldn't say it, he didn't want to frighten Severus with the enormity of his feelings and needs.

"I'd like to take you out to dinner with my co-workers, what do you think?" Sirius reached over his shoulder and put his arm around his husband's narrow back, hugging him tighter to himself. "I would like to show you off." He added just to be able to enjoy the sight of the blush that appeared on his face. Severus, despite his embarrassment maintained eye contact. He was strong, very strong, Sirius had to give him that.

"I have been to many meetings with you with them." Clearly surprised, Severus turned his face towards him and furrowed his brow.

"Oh, I know, but I always want to brag about you, all over again, especially since we have a new employee." Sirius smiled warmly at the look on his husband's face.

"If that is what you want, I will of course accompany you." Slowly the surprise passed and Severus regained control. "Just pick a date." As always, his face was so serious, focused, as if they were discussing world peace.

Sirius loved this very serious approach of his, it was always very heartwarming, he himself did not know why he thought so. Probably because it was Severus. Oh yes, it seems that love made fools of people, but in any case he could live with it. He was ready to jump headlong into this!

His husband moved closer, leaning his back against Sirius, whose hand lazily caressed Severus' shoulder. For a while, Severus read the book again and Sirius let him enjoy literature in peace. Finally, when he noticed that Severus had just finished a chapter, he seized the moment to speak. "I was thinking of something else, too."

"Yes?" Severus' hand covered his hand and Sirius was thankful that he was sitting behind Severus, so he didn't see what effect it had on him, his stupid, happy smile.

Severus sounded so blissful, so at ease, and Sirius felt that if he died now he would die happy. Sirius kissed him on the temple. "Yes. We didn't have a honeymoon..." He paused for a moment, suddenly feeling a wave of shame and regret wash over him at the memory of their wedding night. He could never forgive himself for that, no matter how many times Severus assured him that it was no longer important. He knew better... Severus waited patiently, so Sirius pulled himself together. "I'd like to take you somewhere fun, to some perfect place".

"Oh." Severus turned his face to look him in the eyes. "Now I'm in a perfect place." His pale face turned red as he spoke those words, but he maintained eye contact.

Warmth spilled over Sirius' chest and his face lit up with a smile. "Thank you for those words. You don't even know how much they mean to me." A deeper blush appeared on Severus' cheeks when he heard this.

"But I'd still like to go somewhere with you. We've never been on holiday either, even though I get regular leave from work. Do you take any time off at all?"

Severus settled more comfortably in Sirius' arms and furrowed his brow. "No. I love what I do, so it doesn't feel like work." He then brushed back his hair and put the closed book back on the coffee table. "Leaving sounds good. But not for long, two weeks max. Where would you like to go?"

Sirius rested his chin against Severus' shoulder, so that when he spoke his breath tickled his husband's neck, which didn't seem to make him uncomfortable, judging by the fact that he tilted it slightly, exposing more of his skin. "How about the Carpathian Mountains? That's where I was planning our honeymoon trip." That moment was perfect, Sirius wanted it to always last. He was

afraid to move lest he shatter the moment.

Without thinking for long, he summoned his camera and took a picture of them, wanting physical proof that he wasn't dreaming, to immortalise the moment, to keep it forever so that when it's gone I have something to go back to and draw strength from, just as he did with the Hogwarts photos.

Severus noticed this but did not react in any way. "The Carpathians..." He mused. "Since we'll be in that area, do you think we could also visit Copernicus' house on occasion?" He turned his face towards Sirius, catching his gaze, which Sirius took advantage of by taking another picture of them. At most Severus will admonish him if it bothers him, he concluded.

"Of course, whatever you like!" Sirius with difficulty was hiding his enthusiasm. Severus not only agreed, but even actively started planning! "Maybe we could go there in December? We could ski, drink hot tea and enjoy the beautiful views!"

His husband's eyebrows shot up inquisitively. "Are you going skiing?"

Sirius smiled. "Yes, do you?"

When he was a child, the Black family spent all their winter holidays in the Swiss Alps. On the very first free day, they would pack their suitcases and Floo to their destination. They probably still do it to this day.

He loved this activity very much, the cold that tingled his cheeks, the races with Regulus filled with laughter. With rosy cheeks from the cold and snowflakes landing on their lashes, they would build snowmen together, often ride on sleds, and throw snowballs. Even their parents seemed freer and in good spirits at that time, sometimes joining in the fun. Back then, he hadn't disappointed them yet; back then, they loved him unconditionally.

He was truly happy then.

He missed that time.

Sirius tilted his head slightly and looked at the ceiling. Nonsense, he admonished himself in his thoughts, nothing can last forever, especially not childhood.

Severus shook his head. "I don't." His long black strands of hair tickled Sirius slightly, but he did not change position, did not move away.

"You'll learn!" Sirius kissed him on the cheek and then put his arms around him tighter, resting his chin on his shoulder again. "I will teach you."

But before they could embark on their honeymoon, November arrived, bringing with it Sirius' 24th birthday.

The day before, Sirius had met up with Lily, James, Peter, and Betty at the Potters' place, with Severus being absent because he was working.

The official birthday celebration took place at Sirius' parents' house, as it couldn't have been any other way. There would be no end to the grumbling and complaints if it were otherwise. Not that he was spared from it, he still had to endure listening to them. Unfortunately, he didn't possess the strong personality like Severus did to permanently cut ties with his parents. It is difficult to break with the need for parental love.

Perhaps someday.

Sirius always found his birthdays to be a bittersweet occasion, and he hated them. He much preferred the old ones celebrated with friends at Hogwarts over these "grown-up" ones, filled with endless complaints and confrontations, and disapproving glances from the more respectable family members. During these parties, he felt like a circus animal, like a juggling bear that everyone's eyes were focused on, whose task was to entertain others.

Unfortunately, he disappointed because, as a bear, he was not fit for juggling, and the clubs kept slipping from his big, clumsy paws. What a disappointment Sirius was! Tut, tut!

As the family members took their seats at the table, Sirius couldn't help but notice his mother's disapproving gaze. She didn't pretend to be a loving mother; she probably thought that at the age of 24, he was old enough not to be coddled. She had a talent for turning every gathering into a battlefield, and tonight was no exception, which surprised no one.

She attacked with every clinking of cutlery, biting left and right. In that moment, Sirius wondered, "When did you start hating me, Mother? Or perhaps you never loved me and only tolerated me as long as I proved myself worthy in your eyes?"

"Regulus, my dear," Walpurga began, her voice dripping with genuine warmth, "I heard that you've received another promotion at the ministry. You have a bright future ahead, a devoted wife, and a child on the way. You have truly surpassed your older brother."

Sirius clenched his jaw, trying to maintain composure. He knew his mother's words were meant to hurt him, emphasizing the stark contrast between his own failures and Regulus's successes.

"Leave it, Mum," Regulus mumbled, looking down at his plate.

He clearly seemed troubled. Sirius had long stopped being angry at him. Regulus simply lacked the courage to openly oppose their mother.

Like Sirius, he knew all too well how fragile her love for them was built, one careless step and it would shatter like a glass castle, with sharp shards that Walpurga would use to inflict wounds.

"It's alright, Regulus. Let Mum have her say," Sirius felt sorry for his brother. Why should he also fall out of favor? He could still do it; for now, let him continue to revel in the illusion of love.

Walpurga pressed her lips together and fell silent for a moment, which the guests immediately seized as an opportunity to engage in overly enthusiastic conversations on any topic, just to change the unpleasant atmosphere. And that was that, or so they thought.

Unfortunately, the pause was only temporary. Walpurga's beautiful face lifted, scanning the room, clearly searching for a target. The guests noticed it too, as Sirius observed their conversations becoming even more animated. Not that it could divert Walpurga's attention.

Her eyes narrowed, and Sirius followed her gaze to the chosen victim.

This time, the disapproval was directed at Severus.

"Severus Snape, brilliant scientist and respected author, flourishes in his field. His books enjoy considerable popularity, and his name is known far and wide." She paused for a better effect, while Severus lifted his face and met her gaze calmly. "I suppose you find it amusing, don't you?

Relishing in your own achievements while my son remains a mere Auror without any significant accomplishments."

Severus listened patiently to this and smiled slightly. "No, everything is fine, you don't need to worry, Mother-in-law, I respect your son a lot".

Walpurga raised her eyebrow in mockery, and Sirius felt anger welling up inside him, but Severus didn't react in any way except for lifting his wine glass in a slight toast towards Walpurga and bringing it to his lips.

The annoyed look from his mother now shifted to him.

"It must hurt, doesn't it, Sirius? To see your husband achieve what you cannot."

Sirius clenched his teeth and his fist under the table, but, following Severus's example, he maintained his composure, which didn't come easy to his temperament. He glanced at Severus, who sat next to him with a calm and composed expression. Clearly, he had no intention of being provoked. He was probably right, Sirius acknowledged. Every time he engaged in verbal battles, their arguments never ended. Ignoring seemed to be the best approach.

Mother forced a sweet, artificial smile. "On your birthday, I wish for you to finally start taking life seriously and be ambitious. And you've rested on your laurels and settled for a marriage out of necessity!"

Severus indifferently set his glass down with untouched wine. "It's not quite like that, Mother-in-law. Our marriage is no longer just out of necessity. We care about each other."

There was a moment of silence at the table, interrupted by Walpurga's amused, mocking chuckle.

"If you say so, my dear Severus, it must surely be true!" Her smile faded as she met Severus's gaze, which held a very serious expression, conveying calmness, gravity, indifference, and a lack of emotions. Clearly, this was not the reaction she had expected. She had hoped to provoke Severus as she usually did with Sirius. Severus's response spoiled everything.

With evident annoyance, she grabbed her utensils and returned to her meal.

Right after lunch, as they were walking from the dining room to the entertainment room, Walpurga slowed her pace and held onto Sirius's arm, allowing the others to pass them. Severus glanced in their direction but said nothing, then proceeded with the Malfoys.

When they were alone, Walpurga looked at Sirius. "What was that about what Severus said? Am I supposed to believe that you two are together out of love?" She emphasized the word "love" and finished the sentence with a slight scoff, she let out a slight snort, a mix of both disdain and amusement.

"Believe whatever you want, Mother dear. I have no intention of convincing you," Sirius replied, distancing himself and taking a step, signaling that he considered the conversation over.

"And rightly so, because I don't know what you two are up to, but you can pretend in front of others, just not in front of me!" Walpurga approached Sirius, who had no interest in listening to further arguments and simply ignored her, walking away towards Severus. As he left, he heard her sneer with contempt, "Pathetic!"

"Thank you for the birthday wishes!" He threw before he could stop himself.

It's true, it was pathetic, just not what she meant. Tears of anger and disappointment stung beneath his eyelids, but he wouldn't let them fall. He had something good in his life, something that gave him strength. And it was heading towards him, after noticing his black hair among the others, platinum blonde.

For a moment, he stood unnoticed by Severus, and though he had no intention of eavesdropping, before he could speak, he heard his spouse's comment. "You two never argue."

Sirius saw that Lucius noticed him from the corner of his eye but didn't show any reaction. Before Lucius could respond, Narcissa, standing between them, spoke up, "Never argue? Where did that idea come from, Severus? We've argued many times; we just always work through our misunderstandings instead of getting upset with each other."

Lucius sent a smile to his animated wife and turned back to Severus. "There's no such thing as two halves of an apple. What does that mean for us? It means that most relationships can be worked on, you can learn to be together. If both parties care about each other, there's a good chance they'll find a shared way of life."

Sirius decided that continuing to eavesdrop would be even more inappropriate, so he took a step closer and touched Severus' shoulder, signaling his presence.

Severus turned to him with a slight smile, and suddenly everything was right again.

After leaving the Black mansion, Severus turned to Sirius. "How about taking a walk before heading home?"

Sirius, who would agree to anything proposed by Severus, nodded eagerly. "With pleasure!" He remembered something else. "Thank you for standing up for me! You didn't have to say that." Severus glanced sideways, and despite the darkening sky, it seemed to Sirius that he blushed. "But I wanted to."

That definitely brightened the day.

For a brief moment, they stood in silence before they started walking, leaving the Black estate behind. When they finally reached outside the gate, Severus suddenly stopped.

"One moment." He reached into a pocket hidden within the folds of his robe and pulled out a small rectangular, transparent plastic box with something red inside. He murmured an enlarging spell and soon held a bouquet of roses in his hands, protected from being crushed by the plastic box. He removed the packaging, which he then shrunk and stowed away, before handing the flowers to Sirius. "These are for you." He bites his lower lip lightly, as he always does when he is not fully comfortable.

Sirius was so shocked that he couldn't find words to respond for a moment. He looked at Severus with a questioning gaze, his heart pounding heavily.

A faint blush appeared on Severus' pale face. He shrugged with feigned nonchalance. "You like them." He glanced at the bouquet of flowers between them, as if it held a hint of what to say. "Your family always had arrangements of peonies, lilies, and other flowers in vases, but you always had roses."

The red petals seemed velvety under the soft glow of the streetlamp.

"Oh, you noticed?" Sirius felt himself blush, too, caught in something he didn't have to hide or be ashamed of, and yet he still felt that way. His fondness for roses had also been the subject of ridicule and contempt from his mother, but that didn't surprise him. After the incident with Remus, basically everything he did or was became a flaw in Walburga's eyes.

He accepted the bouquet and eyed it, like a strange animal he was seeing for the first time. He felt joy bursting in his chest. Severus cared, Severus noticed, and paid attention! That meant he wasn't indifferent to him! And instead of mocking, he considered it normal enough to use that freedom and use it to make a gift.

He felt tears welling up in his eyes. He shook his head, trying to calm himself.

"Thank you!" His voice sounded a bit nasal.

Severus stood on tiptoes and quickly kissed him. "Happy birthday."

They walked into the night, side by side, and Sirius felt more alive and youthful than ever before. He felt as though the weight of the world had been lifted off his shoulders.

It was quite cold, but the sky was clear and transparent. They spotted a fairly tall brick wall along Myddelton Passage and, like two nocturnal birds, unnoticed by anyone, without much hesitation, they sat down there.

The sparsely growing trees in front of them gave a depressing impression with their bare branches, appearing dark grey in the light of the night. It was not a beautiful view. On the other hand, magic spread over them.

In silence, they gazed at the sky, at constellations and individual stars and planets.

He felt the urge to reach into his pocket and light a cigarette, an old reflex. He hadn't smoked since

the day Severus told him that he didn't like the smell. It hadn't been too long, so occasionally he still found himself tempted. But he didn't miss it, he replaced it with something better.

When Severus leaned into Sirius' embrace, the weight of evening tensions slowly subsided. The cool night air enveloped them, giving a sense of tranquility as they sat together on a stone wall, their bodies pressed against each other. The stars above shimmered like diamonds, the pale moon illuminated with silver light, adding a certain unreality to everything, as if they were beyond time. Sirius' gaze moved from the heavenly spectacle to the ethereal figure beside him.

Something different, something gentler than before, flickered in Severus' dark eyes. The rigid features of his face also seemed to soften, as if the starlight cast a gentle enchantment on him. It was a side of Severus that Sirius longed to see more often - the sensitive, tender side that only their deepening bond could reveal.

At that moment, words were unnecessary. The silence, accompanied by the symphony of the universe, held them in its embrace.

Sirius' fingers traced delicate patterns on Severus' arm, his touch leaving a trace of warmth against the backdrop of the cool night air. A gentle breeze rustled through their hair, the whisper of the cosmos itself, as, at this moment romantically inclined, Sirius assessed.

Severus turned his gaze toward Sirius, a glimmer of emotion in his eyes. The corners of his mouth curved into a small, sincere smile - a sight that made Sirius' heart beat faster.

The moment was so fragile and precious that Sirius wanted to encase it in gold and wear it around his neck as a medallion.

He hoped that a star would shoot across the sky, as it would fit the mood, but unfortunately, all of them clung firmly to the firmament.

It would have been romantic if Severus fell asleep leaning on his shoulder, but annoyingly, he didn't seem very sleepy. So instead, they sat and gazed at the crystalline clear sky, sprinkled with billions of stars, twinkling and shining brightly, starkly contrasting with the icy void of the cosmos. For billions of years, lifeless stones floated in the vacuum.

But they were alive, here and now.

Sirius smiled slightly to himself, amused by his own naive romanticism and hopes. They would do without shooting stars and a sleeping, defenseless Severus, as adorable as a kitten. They gazed at something that likely perished millions of years ago, the shadows of what once existed.

Longing, need, the killing of loneliness, the desire for love, all focused on this small, delicate body. On this living being of flesh and bone. Breathing, feeling, tangible. Perhaps from today, Sirius will be able to call him his own.

Severus was everything but a defenseless kitten.

It was surprising, he never expected Severus to be the stronger side of the relationship. He, the athlete, confident and tall, leaned on that fragile, introverted being like a vine around a stick. With him, he stood tall; without him, he could only crawl.

He himself was torn by emotions, volatile and susceptible to bouts of despair, while Severus was something steady, stable, rational, and consistent. Severus gave him strength and a sense of security. Sirius was water, Severus was a rock.

He knew he wouldn't achieve anything significant, wouldn't do any of the things he once dreamed of. He and James would never be the first wizards to climb Kilimanjaro, never sail the ocean on a regular boat, nor discover any lost, deserted islands. They will not go on a trek across Eurasia. They won't fulfil any of the dreams they dreamt when they were 16 and lying in a dorm room, after James sneaked into Sirius' bed where they whispered until they were too sleepy and then only came back to themselves.

And he will not take his dreamed beloved on a journey around the world, he will not name a star after her. He won't even be that fearless, highly intelligent Auror who is always a step or two ahead of the villain.

No, none of that.

He was just a wreck of a man, too damaged, too self-doubting to really be of any use.

Too dependent on his friends, too dependent on Severus, too desperately clinging to everything he had, and not wanting to lose any of those things even if they couldn't coexist.

Certainly his desperate dependence on them weighed heavily on others, but there was nothing he could do about it. They were all he had, all he would have for the rest of his life.

He was inept in friendship and inept in love, always disappointing everyone, ruining everything he touched.

He didn't expect such a turn of events when he proposed marriage to Severus. It wasn't supposed to be like this. Life was mocking him, so much.

But still, he received chance after chance, even from Severus, who had no sentimental attachment to him. He got more than he could ever dream of.

Once, he even suggested to Severus to perform Legilimency on him to convince himself that Sirius had truly changed, but Severus merely shook his head. "There's no need for that."

And that was it.

Sirius looked at the sharp profile of his husband, which glowed against the night, with his iridescent white skin making it seem like he produced light himself.

On his other side he had a bouquet of red roses lying next to him. Chosen and bought especially for him.

Did they have a future ahead of them, or only those four years left to fulfill, and after that their paths would separate forever?

Sirius didn't know, anything could happen, it's uncertain what the future will bring. At that moment, the whole world belonged to him and he felt genuine bliss. Would they be happy together? He didn't know it, too, but it was worth it to find out.

And even if it doesn't last, falls apart, Sirius will have as much as Severus gives him, and it will be cherished.

That evening, and every subsequent one, offered to him, every minute spent with someone he loved was worth enduring the overwhelming cold loneliness that could come. Thousands of tears were worth one smile.

They sat there until late into the night, exchanging the warmth of their bodies until their breaths began to rise as a mist. That's when they realized it was already too cold, so they started heading home.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who made it to the end for reading and for your support.

These almost eight months of posting this story have gone by so quickly.

I have grown attached to my Severus and Sirius, I will miss them.

Thank you again!

End Notes

Fanfic update every Friday

Sorry for the delay in responding to comments! I'm not ignoring anyone, just figuring out what I can write back!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!